00110972

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 02 January, 2016

HORÆ HOMILETICÆ,

OR

DISCOURSES

(IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

UPON

The Whole Scriptures.

110972 ae.

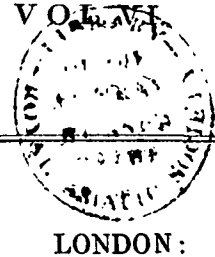
BY

THE REV. C. SIMEON, M.A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

B-e-1

VOL. VI.



LONDON:

PRINTED BY RICHARD WATTS:

AND SOLD BY

CADELL AND DAVIES, STRAND; AND HATCHARD, PICCADILLY;
DEIGHTON AND SONS, AND NICHOLSON, CAMBRIDGE; PARKER, OXFORD;
BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND CUMMING, DUBLIN.

1820.

God
251
Sim/Hor
110972

CONTENTS.

VOL. VI.

Skeleton		Page
547.	*The Fountain of Living Waters*	1
548.	*The Folly of neglecting God*	12
549.	*Repentance the Means of preventing Ruin* . . .	16
550.	*Importance of suppressing Vain Thoughts* . . .	21
551.	*The Miseries of War*	25
552.	*Expostulation with the Impenitent*	29
553.	*Christ our Physician*	34
554.	*Fortitude recommended on the Side of Truth* . .	38
555.	*The Contempt with which God's richest Mercies are treated*	43
556.	*God is desirous of saving Men*	48
557.	*A Pattern for National Humiliation*	50
558.	*How to plead with God*	54
559.	*The Word of God precious*	58
560.	*Necessity of knowing Ourselves*	64
561.	*The Omnipresence of God*	76
562.	*Religion is not a Source of Evil to those who embrace it*	79

Skeleton		Page
563.	*God's gracious Designs towards his Chosen People,*	84
564.	*God's Regard for those who approach unto him* .	88
565.	*Gracious Influences the Fruit of Electing Love* .	91
566.	*The Christian Pilgrims*	96
567.	*The Preached Gospel a Source of Blessings to the World*	99
568.	*The New Covenant*	105
569.	*The Importance of Prayer*	112
570.	*Disobedience to God condemned*	115
571.	*Jehoiakim burns the Sacred Roll*	122
572.	*Dissimulation reproved*	128
573.	*The Means of terminating War*	133
574.	*Duty of acknowledging God's Mercies*	137
575.	*The Benefit of early Afflictions*	142
576.	*Commission given to Ministers*	146
577.	*Approaching End of God's Forbearance* . . .	148
578.	*Duty and Benefit of Mourning for Sin* . . .	153
579.	*Departure of God from his Temple*	158
580.	*Delusive Confidence reproved*	163
581.	*The Effect of God's Mercy on the renewed Soul* .	167
582.	*Parable of the Twig of a Cedar planted in the Height of Israel*	173
583.	*Equity of God in his Judgments*	177
584.	*Men's Treatment of the Gospel*	184
585.	*Office and Responsibility of Ministers*	188
586.	*Christ the Plant of Renown*	192
587.	*The Duty of Self-lothing*	196

Skeleton		Page
588.	*God's Mercies not given for our Merits* . . .	199
589.	*Universal Restoration of the Jews*	203
590.	*The Hebrew Youths in the Fiery Furnace* . . .	221
591.	*Nebuchadnezzar's Dream verified and improved* .	226
592.	*Belshazzar warned of his impending Ruin* . .	231
593.	*Belshazzar's Death*	236
594.	*Daniel's undaunted Piety*	240
595.	*The Decree of Darius*	246
596.	*The Reign of the Saints*	251
597.	*Daniel's Confession*	256
598.	*The Answer to Daniel's Prayer*	260
599.	*God's Dealings with Penitents*	265
600.	*God betrothing us to himself*	273
601.	*Ignorance destructive*	281
602.	*The Evil and Danger of Backsliding*	284
603.	*Spiritual Desertion*	288
604.	*Mercy before Sacrifice*	296
605.	*Our Transgressions of the Covenant*	300
606.	*The Folly of Inconsideration*	304
607.	*Causes and Symptoms of Spiritual Decay* . . .	309
608.	*Guilt and Danger of an Unconverted State* . .	314
609.	*Misery of a Deserted People*	324
610.	*Jacob wrestling with the Angel*	327
611.	*Jehovah alone deserving of our Fear or Confidence,*	330
612.	*Directions for an acceptable Approach to God* .	334
613.	*The Blessings that Penitents may expect* . . .	337
614.	*God's Notice of Penitents*	344

Skeleton		Page
615.	*Spiritual Knowledge peculiar to God's People*	351
616.	*The Removal of Judgments praised*	359
617.	*The Millennium*	362
618.	*God's Complaint against us*	368
619.	*Incorrigibleness reproved*	373
620.	*Conversion of the Jews and Gentiles*	377
621.	*The Millennial State*	380
622.	*Blessed Effects of the Gospel in the Latter Days*	384
623.	*Jonah reproved by the Mariners*	389
624.	*Jonah restored from the Belly of a Fish*	394
625.	*Repentance of the Ninevites*	398
626.	*Jonah's Gourd*	401
627.	*Benefits arising from the Word of God*	405
628.	*Universal Establishment of Christianity*	411
629.	*The Messiah to be born at Bethlehem*	416
630.	*Christ our Peace in Trouble*	422
631.	*The Jews a Blessing to the World*	426
632.	*The Sum of Practical Religion*	433
633.	*Address of the Jewish Church to her Enemies*	438
634.	*God a Refuge in Time of Trouble*	443
635.	*The proper Improvement of God's Mercies*	447
636.	*Our Duty in reference to the Promises*	450
637.	*The Christian's Boast*	454
638.	*The Self-Secure and Atheistical condemned*	456
639.	*Repentance urged*	461
640.	*What Recompence we may expect for our Neglect of God*	464

Skeleton		Page
641.	*The Poor living by Faith*	468
642.	*Consideration of our Ways enforced*	472
643.	*An Exhortation to turn to God*	477
644.	*Christ's Intercession for Jerusalem*	482
645.	*The Restoration of the Jewish Church predicted*	487
646.	*The Vision of the Olive-Trees*	492
647.	*Outward Services vain without Obedience*	498
648.	*The Restoration of the Jews*	501
649.	*The Contempt poured on Christ*	505
650.	*Christ smitten for our Sins*	510
651.	*The Millennial Glory*	515
652.	*Relative Duties to God and Man*	518
653.	*The Calling of the Gentiles*	527
654.	*The Immutability of God*	531
*654.	*Christian Fellowship approved of God*	535

DXLVII.

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS.

Jer. ii. 12, 13. *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

RELIGION may be considered as of two kinds, theoretical and practical. In the term *theoretical*, I include every thing that is necessary to prove the truth of Christianity: and under the term *practical*, whatever is required of those who embrace it. To understand the theoretical part, is desirable; to perform the practical, is necessary. The two kinds, however, are not necessarily united: the theoretical may exist where the practical is disregarded; and the practical may exist, where the theoretical is unknown. Thousands of pious persons have neither leisure nor talent for collating manuscripts, or for weighing the evidences that may be adduced in favour of particular hypotheses: and to say that these cannot be religious, because they are wanting in critical acumen, would be as absurd as to say that a man cannot be honest, because he has not sufficient knowledge of the laws to be a Judge. The unlettered Christian assumes the truth of Christianity; and he finds it true by its effects. And such persons may well refer to the effects, in proof of the truth of that religion which they profess. But it is one thing to refer to practical effects, and another to ground their faith on any transient feelings: *This* no man of reflec-

tion can do: the other, no man of piety can forbear. Feelings may be excited by erroneous notions, as well as by those which are just: but holiness, radical and universal holiness, can be produced by Christianity alone. We will appeal to all the religions that ever appeared upon the face of the earth, and ask, Whether any of them ever produced in their votaries such effects as were visible in Christ and his Apostles? The reason is plain: It is the Spirit of God who sanctifies; and he is promised to those only who believe in Christ: and consequently, his sanctifying energy, in its full extent at least, can be found in them alone. I grant that it would be wrong to rest the truth of our religion on that ground only; but surely it may properly be referred to, as an additional and corroborating proof of our religion. If this be not a proper test of our religion, whereby shall the superior excellency of Christianity be known? If the Bible produce no better effects than the Korân, I do not hesitate to say that it is no better than the Korân: but if its effects be such as no other religion can produce, then will those effects be, though not the only, yet a solid and important proof of our religion: and those who cannot enter into learned disquisitions about the credibility of the Scriptures, have reason to thank God that they have within themselves an evidence of the truth of Christianity, which the objections of infidels can never set aside[a]. The error lies in confounding the two kinds of religion. They are distinct; and they should be kept so.

To enter deeply into the theory of religion, much strength of intellect, much general knowledge, and much

[a] The author does not mean, that this is the *only* evidence which unlearned men have of the Divine authority of the Bible. They, as well as the Learned, have other grounds for their faith. They see the provision, which the Bible makes for their restoration to happiness, to be precisely such as their necessities required. They see also, that the purity of its commands has a wonderful tendency to elevate their nature, and to produce universal happiness: and these two things form in their minds a strong *internal* evidence of the Divine origin of the Bible; whilst the general and long-continued reception

much patient investigation, are requisite. To have just, and even enlarged, views of the practical part, little is wanting, but a humble teachable mind, enlightened by the truths, and sanctified by the influence of the Gospel of Christ. The former, when possessed in the highest degree, will consist with all manner of evil tempers and evil habits: the latter necessarily involves in it a change both of heart and life. The former is of importance principally to those, whose office calls them to defend the outworks of Christianity against the assaults of infidels: the latter is essential to the happiness of every individual. To the former your minds are now directed from time to time, by a zealous and learned Professor[b], who is giving us the result of his own laborious researches, and commendably exerting his talents to promote amongst us the too much neglected study of Sacred Literature: to the latter, which we consider as more appropriate to the ordinary services of the Church, we would on the present occasion solicit your attention.

The subject which we would submit to your consideration, is a solemn charge, brought by God himself against his people of old. They were guilty of gross idolatry; and for that, in part, they are here reproved: the very heavens are summoned to bear witness against them, and to express with utter astonishment their abhorrence of such impiety. But another complaint against them was, that, in their straits and difficulties, they were ever looking to Egypt and Assyria for help, instead of relying on the

reception of that book amongst those who have spent their whole lives in investigating its authenticity, serves in their minds as a strong *external* evidence, that the Bible is really given by the inspiration of God. Nevertheless, their actual experience of a change of heart and life, wrought in them by the Bible, is *to them* a strong *additional* evidence of its Divine authority. Of course, this change cannot produce any conviction in the minds of *others*; because none but God and a man's own conscience can know the full extent of that change.

[b] The Rev. HERBERT MARSH, D. D. now The Right Rev. Lord Bishop of Peterborough, of St. John's College, Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity; who was giving Public Lectures in the University Church, on the principal subjects connected with Theological Learning.

the Lord their God. Now if, in respect of gross idolatry, the passage be thought more immediately applicable to them, it will nevertheless, as a charge of spiritual idolatry, be found to contain ample matter of accusation against ourselves.

Let us then consider,

I. The evils which God lays to our charge;

II. The light in which they should be viewed.

I. The evils which God lays to our charge are, that we have forsaken him, and sought our happiness in the creature rather than in the Creator. He justly calls himself "the fountain of living waters;" for he is, and must be acknowledged to be, the only source of all good. What is there in the visible creation, that is not the product of his power, and the gift of his grace? or what is there that can afford satisfaction to the souls of men, or to the bright intelligences of heaven, which does not emanate from his presence and love? If it be replied, that many sources of consolation are opened for us in the contemplations of reason, or the gratifications of sense; we answer, That the very capacity to communicate or receive pleasure is the fruit of his bounty; and that the creature can be no more to us than what he is pleased to make it.

What then does he require of us? He calls us to regard him as the one source of happiness to ourselves; to acknowledge him in all that we have; and to trust in him for all that we stand in need of. He calls us to resemble our first parents in their primitive state; yea, to resemble the very angels around his throne; and to delight ourselves in him, as our Friend, our Portion, "our eternal great Reward." By sin, indeed, we are become incapable of fulfilling these duties, or of experiencing these enjoyments, to the extent we ought: but still God desires to restore us to the felicity which we have lost, and to communicate to us all those blessings which we have forfeited by our transgressions.

Happy would it be for us, if we were duly impressed

pressed with this unmerited kindness and unbounded mercy. But, instead of seeking blessedness in him, we forsake him utterly: we cast off his yoke, we trample on his laws, we put him far from us, and, as much as we can, we cast him even out of our thoughts.

Now let us see what is that rival which we prefer: it is the creature, justly called "a broken cistern." Some look for happiness in the gratifications of sense; others, in the attainment of wealth or honour; others, in the pursuits of science or philosophy. We beg to be clearly understood when speaking on this subject: we do not mean to condemn pleasure, honour, wealth, or science, as evil in themselves: they all have their legitimate and appropriate use, and all may be pursued and enjoyed in perfect consistency with a good conscience. It is quite a mistake to think that religion is opposed to any of these things: on the contrary, it leads to the richest enjoyment of created good, and enjoins, instead of prohibiting, a diligent performance of every known duty. If subordinated to religion, and pursued for God, we repeat it, that the pleasures of sense may be possessed, and the duties of every station discharged: nay more, we declare that no man can be religious without endeavouring to fulfil the duties of his calling, whether they be commercial or military, philosophical or religious. But the evil incident to these things consists in making them the great end of life; in suffering them to draw away our hearts from God, or to occupy that place in our affections which is due to God alone. It is in *this* view that we are to be understood as denominating the pursuit of these things "*evil*;" and we doubt not but that the consciences of all attest the truth of our statement, and accede fully to that Apostolic, that incontrovertible position, that to "love and serve the creature more than the Creator" is idolatry.

We have digressed a little, for the purpose of being more clearly understood. Let us now return to our observation, that the creature, which is suffered

to

to rival God in our affections, whatever it may be, is only "a broken cistern." Who will venture to say that he has ever found solid and permanent satisfaction in the creature? Who has lived any considerable time in the world without learning, by his own experience, the truth of Solomon's observation, that "all below the sun is vanity?" Yet, whatever our experience has been, we still follow our own delusions, and run after a phantom, which, while we think to apprehend it, eludes our grasp. We think that the pleasures of the world will make us happy: we follow them, and for a moment dream that we are happy; but we wake, and find that it was but a dream. We next try wealth or honour: we run the race; we attain the prize; and find at last that we have been following a shadow. We imagine, perhaps, that science and philosophy, being so much more elevated in their nature than the common concerns of life, will form a kind of paradise for us: we labour, we press forward, we become distinguished for high attainments, but are as far off from solid happiness as ever: and are constrained to join our testimony to that of the wisest of men, after he had "sought out all things that are done under the heaven," that even wisdom, with all its high attainments, is only "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Such is the charge which God has exhibited against us; and we appeal to every man's conscience for the truth of it. Is there so much as one amongst us whose conscience does not tell him, "Thou art the man?" We are God's people, as much as the Jews of old were: "He hath nourished and brought us up, and yet we have rebelled against him: The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Notwithstanding a secret conviction that God was the only source of real happiness, we could not prevail upon ourselves to seek after him: and notwithstanding our daily experience of the insufficiency of the creature to make us happy, we could not relinquish the vain pursuit. We have hewed out one

cistern,

cistern, and found it incapable of retaining any water: we have then renewed our labour, and hewed out another; which we have found as unproductive of solid benefit as the former. We have even worn ourselves out with the pursuit of various and successive vanities, yet have persisted in our error, untaught by experience, and unwearied by disappointments. Even to the close of life "we hold fast deceit;" "we refuse to return;" "a deceived heart hath turned us aside, so that we cannot deliver our souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Will any contend, that these pursuits are not evil? Surely they are evil in the sight of God. So far from passing over the whole as of small account, he disjoins and separates the different parts of his charge, and declares, that on account of each we are involved in guilt. Our neglect of him has been exceeding sinful, as our attachment to vanity has also been: "My people have committed *two* evils."

But on this part of our subject we shall enter more fully, whilst we consider,

II. In what light we should view these evils—

We are apt to palliate our conduct, and to say, What great harm is there in these things? But if we look to our text, we shall see that they are both *heinous in themselves*, and *terrible in their consequences*. In respect of *heinousness*, I scarcely know whether is greater, their *guilt* or their *folly*. Only let us consider what advantages we have enjoyed for the knowledge and service of God. Is it nothing that we have been endowed with such noble capacities, and neglected to improve them; insomuch that the progressive enlargement of them has tended rather to increase our alienation from God, than to bring us nearer to him? Is it nothing that we have had the Inspired Volume in our hands, and yet have scarcely differed at all, except in speculative notions, from the heathen? Is it nothing that we have provoked God to jealousy with things which cannot profit, and preferred even the basest lust before him? Is it nothing that we have

despised

despised Redeeming love, trodden under foot the Son of God, counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace? Should we account it a light matter, if we ourselves were treated thus by our servants and children; if they cast off all regard for us, and poured contempt upon us, and set at nought our authority, neglecting every thing that we commanded, doing every thing that we forbade, and persisting in such conduct for years together, in spite of every thing we could say or do to reclaim them? And if *we* should resent such conduct, shall not *God* much more? But, whatever we may think of these things, God calls them "*evils*," and such too as may well excite "astonishment" amongst all the hosts of heaven: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this!"

Nor is the *folly* of such conduct less than the malignity. Suppose only that one half the labour, which we have used in the pursuit of vanities, had been employed in the service of our God; or suppose that only the Sabbaths (a seventh part of our time) had been improved with that assiduity and constancy which we have exerted on other days in the pursuit of this world; I will venture to say, that had even that measure of piety been exercised by us, we should have been far happier here, and should have had infinitely better prospects in the eternal world. What amazing folly, then, have we been guilty of! Truly, if the fact were not proved beyond a possibility of doubt, it would not be credited, that persons possessed of reason could act so irrational a part. But, to view it in a proper light, we should attend to the representation given of it in the text. It is true, the picture is so strong, and yet withal so exact, that we shall scarcely endure to look at it. But let us contemplate it a moment: let us imagine to ourselves a person dwelling close to a perennial spring of water, and yet with great labour and fatigue hewing out first one cistern, and then another, and, after multiplied disappointments, dying at last of thirst. By what name should we designate this?

Should

Should we be content with calling it folly? Should we not soon find for it a more appropriate and humiliating term? Let us take this then as a glass wherein to view our own likeness: it is no exaggerated representation, but the precise view in which God sees our conduct. We are aware, that the idea suggested implies such a degree of infatuation as almost to provoke a smile: but the more humiliating the picture, the more need there is that we should contemplate it: and my labour will not have been lost, if a few only of the present assembly be led to bear it in remembrance, and to meditate upon it in their secret retirement.

We have further to remark, that these evils are represented in the text as *terrible also in their consequences*. Men do not like, in general, to hear of this: they wish rather to have it kept out of sight. But it is melancholy that they should so labour to deceive their own souls. If, by concealing the consequences of sin, we could prevent them, we should be the last to bring them forward to your view: but if it be the surest way to draw them down upon you, surely we should deserve ill at your hands if we forbore to warn you of them. It is not thus that the Prophets and Apostles acted: nor is it thus that God would have us act. He bids us to "warn the wicked of their evil ways:" and declares, that if we neglect to do so, he "will require their blood at our hands." In order, then, that the danger of such sins as are here laid to our charge may appear, consider what are the representations given of it in the holy Scriptures. If there be one image more terrible than another, it is that of lying down in a lake of fire and brimstone, ever to be consuming and unconsumed: yet that is the image repeatedly employed by Christ himself, in order to represent the misery that awaits the impenitent and unbelieving world. This will account for the extreme anxiety and sorrow which holy men of old expressed when contemplating the danger to which their fellow-creatures were exposed: "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes," says David, "because men keep not thy law:"

law:" And again, "I am horribly afraid for the ungodly that forsake thy law." Indeed, how is it possible to entertain light thoughts of this, if we only consider what have uniformly been the feelings of men, the very moment that they have come to a just sense of their state? See the jailor's agitation; or hear the cries of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. Nay, we need only consider what our own apprehensions sometimes have been, when sickness has come upon us, or death appeared to be nigh at hand. But, if yet we be disposed to doubt, let us ask, Wherefore is it that God calls on the heavens to "be horribly afraid, and to be very desolate?" Is there no cause for such language? Is it intended only to alarm us, and to excite unfounded apprehensions? No, surely: it is founded in truth: it is the effusion of unbounded love; the compassionate warning of a tender Father. Permit me, then, once more to say, that the forsaking of the Fountain of Living Waters is an evil, a great evil; and that the hewing out of broken cisterns for ourselves is also a great evil. God views these evils in all their malignity: the angels also that are around the throne, view them with deep solicitude, anxiously desiring to see us escape from them, and waiting in readiness to rejoice over our return to God. Oh that we might no longer indulge a fatal security! "no longer say, Peace, peace, lest sudden destruction come upon us without any way to escape!" If God were a hard master, and his service irksome, there would be some shadow of excuse for such conduct. But, who ever sought after God in vain, provided he sought in sincerity and truth? and, whoever found him without finding in him all that could comfort and enrich the soul? God himself puts the question; "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?"

Shall we plead, as an excuse, that religion is a source

source of melancholy? Surely they who harbour such an opinion have never known what religion is. That a neglect of religion will make us melancholy, is clear enough, as well from the dissatisfaction which, notwithstanding our diversified enjoyments, generally prevails, as from the disquietude which men feel in the prospect of death and judgment. But religion, true religion, brings peace into the soul: it leads us to the Fountain of Living Water, where we can at all times quench our thirst, and taste beforehand the felicity of heaven. Our blessed Lord invites us to him in this view: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" and "The water that I will give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life." Listen, then, to that expostulation of the prophet; "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." Return to the Fountain; and make the experiment, at least: see whether there be not more happiness in turning from vanity, than in embracing it; in seeking after God, than in forsaking him; in the holy exercises of prayer and praise, than in a brutish neglect of these duties; in applying to your souls the promises of Christ, than in a profane contempt of them; and, lastly, in obtaining sweet foretastes of heavenly bliss, than in reluctant approaches towards an unknown eternity. O that I might not commend this Fountain to you in vain! All ranks and orders amongst you are beginning to shew a laudable attention to the theory of religion: O that you might begin to shew it to the practice also! You are not backward to manifest your approbation of that zeal which directs you to the *evidences* of religion: be ye not therefore offended with that, which solicits your attention to its *effects*.

DXLVIII.

THE FOLLY OF NEGLECTING GOD.

Jer. ii. 27, 28. *They have turned their back unto me, and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us! But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble.*

AMONGST the various powers which distinguish man from all the rest of the creation, is the faculty of looking forward to future events, and of receiving, by anticipation, impressions suited to them. This faculty is given to him principally for the furtherance of his eternal welfare: and, if he used it aright, he could not fail of attaining eternal blessedness. But as he abuses his other powers, so does he grievously misimprove this: he employs it for the purpose of temporal advancement; but forgets its use in reference to eternity. Hence, till affliction bring him to a juster view of his condition, he casts off all fear of God, and lives, as it were, "without God in the world." Of this God complained respecting his people of old; and at the same time he warned them of the bitter consequences that would ensue from it; for, if they persisted in looking to their false gods in the time of prosperity, they should have none other to assist them in the season of adversity.

From the words thus explained, we may take occasion to shew,

I. The conduct of sinners towards their God—

Man in every age, especially if he have any knowledge of a Supreme Being, pursues nearly the same course, till he has been converted by Divine grace.

In the text we behold how he conducts himself,

1. In a state of ease—

[It is surprising to see how entirely men banish from their minds all thoughts of God. Though called and invited to draw nigh to him, they cannot be prevailed upon to bow their knees before him, and to seek his face in prayer[a]. If at any time they

[a] Isai. lxiv. 7.

they draw nigh to him in public, it is not really to know his will, or to enjoy his presence, but merely to perform a duty, in which their hearts are not at all engaged[b].

But the expression in our text imports, not merely a neglect of God, but a contempt of him also. And a most awful mark of contempt it is, to turn our back upon him when he calls us, instead of turning to him our face. Yet thus it is that we treat him exactly as his people did even in his very Temple[c]: we all have idols in our hearts; and those we serve to the utter neglect of God; and, when reminded of our duty to him, we cry, "Who is the Lord? I know him not;" "I will have nothing to do with him;" "I desire not the knowledge of his ways[d]."]

2. In a state of trouble—

[Few are so hardened in iniquity, but they will begin to reflect on their ways when they come into trouble: "they will pour out a prayer, when God's chastening is upon them[e]." Even hypocrites[f], yea and heathens too[g], when reduced to great extremities, will cry for help: "In their affliction," says God, "they will seek me early[h]." Nay more, they will express, not only importunity, but, as our text intimates, a considerable measure of impatience also: as if God were bound immediately to interpose for them, though they have rejected and "forgotten him days without number[i]." The whole of their conduct is beautifully set forth in the preceding context, under the image of "a wild ass." She, when seeking her mate, is so wild, that no one will attempt to catch her: but, when the time is come for her to be delivered of her young, she may easily be caught[k]. So it is with sinners, when bent upon the gratification of their earthly and sensual desires, they prosecute their own ways without restraint, and laugh at all our efforts to apprehend them: but, when burthened and bowed down with trouble, they will suffer us to approach them, and will bear to hear the voice of counsel and reproof. Their affliction represses for a season their spirit of rebellion, and brings them to a better mind.]

Still however their conduct is most perilous; as will appear, whilst we shew,

II. The folly and danger of it—

To manifest this, we need only consider,

1. The disappointment it will occasion—

[Even *now*, in the midst of all their pursuits, we would ask the

[b] Matt. xv. 8. [c] Ezek. viii. 16.
[d] Compare Jer. ii. 31. with Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 4. & lxxxi. 11. Job xxi. 14, 15. Isai. xxx. 11.
[e] Isai. xxvi. 16. [f] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. [g] Jon. i. 5.
[h] Hos. v. 15. [i] ver. 22. with Isai. lviii. 3.
[k] ver. 23, 24.

the ungodly, Whether they have ever found any solid satisfaction in the vanities of time and sense? and has not the creature invariably proved to them "a broken cistern, that could hold no water [l]?" Yes assuredly, they have "spent their money for that which is not bread, and laboured for that which satisfieth not [m];" or rather, as it is well expressed, "Have sought to fill their belly with the east wind [n]." And this is what God has repeatedly forewarned them of in his blessed word: "Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity; for vanity shall be his recompence [o]." And if even now, "in the time of their sufficiency, they be in straits [p]," how much more, *when they come into trouble*, may it be asked, "What fruit have ye of these things whereof ye are now ashamed?" Will their pleasures, their riches, or their honours, which they once sought with such avidity, then comfort them? Alas! how little can such things do to assuage even the pains of a diseased body, and much more to pacify a guilty conscience, and to compose the mind, in the prospect of death and judgment! Truly, "miserable comforters are they all." Yet to them will God leave us in the day of our calamity, if we will persist in making them our idols during the season of our health. This he tells us in our text; "Let the gods that thou hast made to thee, arise and save thee." It was thus that he mocked his people of old, when they had withstood all the corrections of his providence [q]: and thus he has declared that he will mock us also, if we continue obstinately to withstand all the overtures of his love and mercy [r].

But, even supposing that the vanities of this world were not so ineffectual for our present support as they are found to be, of what use or benefit will they be found *when we are standing at the judgment-seat of Christ?* Will they interpose between us and an angry God? or will they descend with us into those gloomy mansions to which their votaries will be doomed, and there alleviate the anguish of our minds? Will the friends, by whom we were induced to turn our back on God, confirm to us all the promises they made to us, and obtain for us that blessedness which they so confidently assured us was in no danger of being lost? Ah, the disappointment which we shall feel in that day, when no possibility remains of rectifying our error! How shall we curse our folly for giving way to such delusions, and feel that truth which we are now so backward to believe, that "they who observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies [s]!"]

2. The reflections to which it will give rise—

[Here we will not give ourselves time to reflect; but when we come into the eternal world, we shall have nothing else to do [t]: and then how inexpressibly painful will it be to reflect, "I once

[l] ver. 13. [m] Isai. lv. 2. [n] Job xv. 2.
[o] ib. ver. 31. [p] Job xx. 22. [q] Judg. x. 10—14.
[r] Prov. i. 24—31. [s] Jon. ii. 8. [t] Wisd. v. 4.

"I once had a God of infinite love and mercy calling me to accept of reconciliation with him; I had a Saviour too who offered to cleanse me in his blood from all my sins, and to clothe me in the robe of his own unspotted righteousness: by his holy Spirit also my Saviour strove with me, to bring me to repentance, and to guide my feet into the way of peace. Once had I ordinances, wherein I might have enjoyed my God; and Ministers by whom I might have been led to the great Shepherd and Bishop of my soul. But now all those blessings are withdrawn, and are for ever hid from my eyes. I valued them not when they were within my reach: I had no taste but for the vanities of this world; and, like Esau, I sold heaven itself for a poor worthless momentary enjoyment: now too, like him, I am rejected, and could find no place of repentance in my Father's mind, though I should seek it ever so carefully with tears[u]." Now I find that God's word was true; and that the harvest which we must reap accords with the seed we sowed: "I reap now nothing but corruption, because I sowed only to the flesh;" whereas, if I could have been prevailed upon to "sow unto the Spirit, I should at this moment have been reaping everlasting life[x]." I now call to my God, and beg him to send me only a drop of water to cool my tongue; but he bids me go for relief to the gods which I preferred before him, and reminds me, that, having received the consolations which I desired, I have no other to expect at his hands[y].

Such is the portion of those who neglect God: "they sow the wind, and they reap the whirlwind[z]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those that are at ease in their sins—

[You think it time enough to seek the Lord when you are no longer able to enjoy the world. But are you sure that time will be afforded you, if you neglect the present hour; or that God will hear you, when your prayers are extorted only by pain and terrors? Such delays receive but little countenance from God in the passage we are considering, or indeed in any other part of Holy Writ[a]. "Seek then the Lord *whilst he may be found;* call ye upon him whilst he *is near*[b]."]

2. Those who are brought into any kind of trouble—

[Now then at least is the time for *you* to call upon your God; for when will you do it, if not in the time of trouble? Will you stay till you are summoned before his judgment-seat? Will you not begin to look for the Bridegroom, till he is already entered into his house, and the door is shut? O look upon your affliction

[u] Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. with Heb. xii. 16, 17. [x] Gal. vi. 7, 8.
[y] Luke xvi. 24—26. [z] Hos. viii. 7.
[a] See Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. Hos. iv. 17. Luke xix. 42.
[b] Isai. lv. 6.

affliction as the voice of God: receive it as a messenger sent from him to prepare you for his presence: and remember, if he has warned you of your danger, he has also given you encouragement to turn unto him. He has shewn you, in his reception of the Prodigal, how ready he is to receive returning penitents[c]; and, in his mercy to Manasseh, how great iniquities he can pardon[d]. "Only return then unto him; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."]

3. Those who have already begun to seek the Lord—

[Say, Whether it has been in vain to seek the Lord? Has he been "a wilderness to you, or a land of darkness[e]?" Has he not done more for you than the world ever did, and rendered you happier than you ever were in the days of your vanity? Be thankful to him then that he ever enabled you to "choose the good part, which shall never be taken away from you." If trouble come to you, you have no need to fear[f]; for it is sent by him in love to purge you from your remaining dross, and fit you for his presence, where is fulness of joy for evermore.]

[c] Luke xv. 20—24. [d] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 10—13.
[e] ver. 31. [f] 1 Pet. iii. 13.

DXLIX.

REPENTANCE THE MEANS OF PREVENTING RUIN.

Jer. iv. 3, 4. *Thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.*

THE language of the Prophets is highly figurative, and therefore sometimes difficult to be understood; but, when judiciously explained, it will always be found highly instructive. Of course, it will not be right to press a metaphorical expression too far; nor should an idea that may seem indelicate, be so touched as to offend the nicest ear[a]: but, when the general import of the metaphor is seen, the subject contained in it may be prosecuted to great advantage.

[a] This hint should be very strictly attended to, in preaching on such a text as this.

tage. It is obvious that some very important instruction is conveyed in the passage before us: and it will be found no less applicable to ourselves than to the Jews of old, if we consider,

I. The duties here enjoined—

These are set forth under two different images; the one taken from breaking up fallow ground, and the other from the Jewish rite of circumcision. To ascertain the import of those images, we need only refer to a parallel passage in the prophet Ezekiel, where the same duties are inculcated in plain and simple terms; "Repent and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[b]." Two duties then are here enjoined;

1. Repentance—

[The heart of man by nature may justly be compared with uncultivated ground that is covered with thorns and briers: for it is obdurate, and altogether unfit for the reception of any good seed, till it has been "broken up," and cleared of its noxious products. Let any one examine his own heart, and he will find this representation true. As to the outward acts of men, there certainly is a great difference, yea, and in their inward dispositions too; but in respect of love to God and delight in his service, all are on the same level; "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be[c]." It is full of "earthly, sensual, devilish" affections, which must be rooted up, before the graces of God's Spirit can grow within it. But this cannot be done by a slight and superficial work: the plough must enter into the very soul, as it did on the day of Pentecost: we must be made to feel our desert and danger, and be brought to the condition of the poor repenting publican[d]. Let every Child of man bear this in mind; for it is "the broken and contrite heart alone, which God will not despise;" and "except ye thus repent, ye must all inevitably perish."]

2. Amendment—

[Circumcision was not only "a seal" on God's part, marking Israel for his own peculiar people, but it was *a sign* also on the part of Israel, denoting their obligation to "put off the body of the sins of the flesh[e]," and to love and serve God with all their hearts[f]. In this sense, though the rite itself is superseded by Baptism, the *term* may justly be applied to us. We must

[b] Ezek. xviii. 30. [c] Rom. viii. 7. [d] Luke xviii. 13.
[e] Col. ii. 11. [f] Deut. xxx. 6.

must have "our hearts circumcised unto the Lord:" we must "mortify our earthly members[g]," and "put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts[h]." Whatever pain it may occasion us to part with "our besetting sins," (for circumcision was a painful rite,) it must be submitted to, even as a man gladly parts with a diseased member for the preservation of his whole body. Our blessed Lord assures us, that if we wilfully retain *one* bosom lust, we must perish in that "fire that never shall be quenched[i]."]

This awful truth being so strongly marked in our text, we will proceed to shew,

II. The connexion between these duties and the Divine favour—

In its primary sense, the threatening in our text may be considered as denouncing temporal judgments on the Jewish nation: but it must also be understood in reference to those eternal judgments which we all have merited by our iniquities. For the averting of those judgments, repentance and amendment are indispensably necessary:

1. *Not*, however, in a way of *meritorious efficiency*—

[It is not possible for man to merit any thing at God's hands. As transgressors of his law, we are justly exposed to his everlasting displeasure[k]: and, if we could perfectly obey his law in future, our obedience would no more cancel our obligation to punishment for past disobedience, than our future abstinence from incurring debts would discharge the debts already incurred. But the truth is, that every thing we do, is imperfect, and needs forgiveness on account of its imperfection: and therefore to dream of meriting pardon by deeds which themselves stand in need of pardon, must be folly in the extreme. There is but one way of obtaining deliverance from the punishment of sin, and that is through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is his meritorious sacrifice which alone expiates the guilt of sin: and, if we look to any thing else, either in whole or in part, for pardon and acceptance, we effectually cut ourselves off from all hope of his salvation. However we may "plough up the fallow ground, and sow in righteousness, we must reap *in mercy*," and in *mercy alone*[l]. Salvation is altogether of grace, through faith[m]: and *in point of dependence*, we must renounce our best actions as much as our vilest sins.]

2. But

[g] Col. iii. 5. Gal. v. 24.
[h] Mark ix. 43—48.
[i] Hos. x. 12.
[k] Eph. iv. 22.
[l] Rom. iii. 19.
[m] Eph. ii. 8, 9.

2. But in a way of *suitable preparation*—.

[Repentance and amendment are necessary both to *an honourable exercise of mercy on God's part*, and to *a becoming reception of mercy on our part*.

If God were not to require humiliation in us, and a mortification of our sins, what evidence would there be that He is holy; and in what light would he appear as the Moral Governor of the Universe? Surely he would be thought indifferent about the honour of his law, and regardless of the moral character of his creatures. But he will not so dishonour his own perfections: and therefore, even when most anxious to display his mercy, he requires an acknowledgment of sin on our part[n], and declares, that, if we will not humble ourselves before him, he will proceed against us with deserved rigour[o].

But if we could conceive that God should pardon an unrepenting sinner, the sinner himself would not value a pardon so offered: he would rather think it an insult than a favour: for, whilst he is unconscious that he deserves the wrath of God, he would account it an injustice even to be supposed to merit it. Again, suppose the pardon actually bestowed, what gratitude would he feel for the gift bestowed? or what endeavours would he make to glorify God in future? Would he not account sin a light matter? Would he not readily return to it, even "as a dog to his vomit, or the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire?" We may ask once more; supposing him forgiven, how could he join in the songs of the Redeemed above? They are prostrating themselves with profoundest adoration before the throne of God, and singing praises incessantly "to Him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood:" but *he* has no heart for such exercises: instead of magnifying his God and Saviour for the greatness of his mercy towards him, he would be congratulating himself that he had never merited any other portion.

Here then the connexion between these duties and our forgiveness is manifest: it is founded, not in any vain ideas of merit, but in the immutable decrees of God: God cannot dishonour himself; nor can man be saved in any other way, than by "confessing and forsaking his iniquities[p]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never yet been awakened to a sense of their sins—

[Alas! how many amongst us are yet "uncircumcised in heart and ears?" How many have never yet wept and mourned in secret for their sins, and never adopted the resolution of the Prodigal, "I will arise and go to my Father." But God forbid that

[n] Jer. iii. 12, 13. [o] Jer. ii. 35. [p] Prov. xxviii. 13.

that they should continue any longer in such fatal security. Hear, every one of you, the command of God: "Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up[q]." This, this is the great business of life: in comparison of this, every pursuit is light and vain. "To flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life!" O who can paint in sufficiently glowing colours the importance and excellency of such an employment?

Some may perhaps reply, that they cannot do these things. True, we cannot of ourselves; but will not God enable us to do them, if we seek the aid of his Holy Spirit? Has he not expressly told us, that his "grace shall be sufficient for us?" I say then, "Plough up your fallow ground;" "make you a new heart, and a new spirit:" and when you find your own insufficiency, then plead with God the promises he has made, and cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me[r]!" That prayer, if offered in faith, shall surely be answered; and you shall find to your joy, that you "can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you."]

2. Those who make a profession of religion—

[Do not imagine that it is sufficient to break up the fallow ground *once*: the husbandman ploughs his ground often, especially if it be a soil that is full of noxious plants. Thus then must you do: there is no soil so bad as the heart of a carnal man: weeds are growing up continually: and it must be the labour of your life to pluck them up. How many professors of religion have the good seed choked and rendered unfruitful, through their negligence in pulling up the thorns and briers that grow up with it[s]! It is an awful truth, that no people are farther from the kingdom of God than they; because they are of all persons the most difficult to be brought to a sense of their danger. But St. Paul marks in very striking terms the difference between such persons and the true Christian: against those he cautions us, "Beware of dogs, beware of *the concision*: WE are *the circumcision*, who worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh[t]." A profession of religion, however clear your knowledge of the Gospel may be, will not suffice: for "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God[u]."]

[q] Jam. iv. 9, 10.

[r] Compare the command, Ezek. xviii. 31. with the promise, Ezek. xxxvi. 26. and the petition, Ps. li. 10.

[s] Matt. xiii. 7, 22. [t] Phil. iii. 2, 3.

[u] Rom. ii. 28, 29. See also ib. ver. 25—27.

DL.

IMPORTANCE OF SUPPRESSING VAIN THOUGHTS.

Jer. iv. 14. *O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?*

THE displeasure of God is never raised to such an height, but that he is willing to pardon his offending creatures, and longs for their repentance on purpose that he may exercise his mercy towards them. The denunciations of his wrath do indeed frequently appear as if they could not be reversed: but they always, even when most positive, imply a condition, and leave room for hope. The approaching destruction of Nineveh was foretold by the prophet in terms which seemed to preclude a possibility of their escape: but their penitence averted the impending storm. Thus, in the chapter before us, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldæans is spoken of as hastening with the velocity of an eagle, insomuch that the prophet complains of it as already accomplished: "Woe unto us! for we are spoiled:" yet in the very next words he introduces, as in a parenthesis, a brief and pathetic exhortation to repentance, as the sure and only means of staying the divine judgments.

It should seem that, in the midst of all their wickedness, the Jews buoyed up themselves with expectations that the threatened calamities would never come. In reference to these vain hopes the prophet addresses them in the words which we have just read. In these words we see that God notices the "vain thoughts," as well as the sinful actions, of men; and that he requires "*the heart*" to be purified from *those*, as well as *the life* from *these*.

We shall take occasion therefore from the text to shew,

I. What are those vain thoughts which are apt to lodge within us—

Of course it will not be possible to notice all the vain

vain thoughts that rush into the minds of men; (we might as well attempt to number the sands upon the sea shore:) we must content ourselves with mentioning a few, which deserve more particular attention.

St. Paul speaks of a "filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit:" agreeably to which distinction we may arrange our thoughts under two heads;

1. Spiritual—

[There are many "vain thoughts," which, on account of their having their seat and empire in the mind only, may be called spiritual; but which are peculiarly hateful to God.

What *proud* thoughts are apt to infest the mind! It is no small complacency which people feel in the beauty of their persons, the elegance of their dress, the dignity of their titles, or the extent and variety of their intellectual acquirements. Even in reference to religion itself, how common is it to behold men puffed up with vain conceit, imagining themselves *wise*, when they are "born like a wild ass's colt;" and *good*, when they are "enemies to God by wicked works!"

Unbelieving thoughts also are ever ready to arise. Indeed, these almost universally prevail. Whence is it that men are so secure, so easy in their sins? Whence is it that all the promises and threatenings of the Gospel have so little weight? Is it not from the secret thought that God's word shall never be fulfilled, and that, however they may live, they shall have peace at the last? And are not such thoughts peculiarly displeasing to God[a]?

Amongst the most sinful thoughts that can occupy the mind, are those which are *vindictive*: yet how apt are they to rankle in the breast! What a tumult will they excite within us, agitating our frame, and instigating us to the most bitter invectives, hasty purposes, and violent proceedings! It is well for mankind that all are not equally susceptible of these impressions; but there are few, if any, who have not found them, on some occasions, disturbing their own peace, and operating to the destruction of Christian charity. Nothing can more strongly mark the impiety of such thoughts than God's express declaration, that he himself will never forgive any person that entertains them in his heart[b].]

2. Carnal—

[Amongst carnal thoughts we number those which relate either to the world or to the flesh.

The world tempts us principally to *anxious*, *covetous*, or *ambitious* thoughts. To these all are more or less exposed: the statesman, the warrior, the merchant, the mechanic, yea, all orders and degrees of men, are impelled or distracted by them. Doubtless,

[a] Deut. xxix. 19, 20. [b] Matt. xviii. 35.

Doubtless, it is the duty of every man to attend to the proper business of his calling: but when his mind is so occupied with earthly things as that he can find no delight in those which are heavenly, he is sinning against God, who would have him without carefulness[c], and commands him to "set his affections on things above, and not on things below[d]."

It is scarcely needful to mention, that amongst the vainest thoughts which find a lodgement within us, are those which are *impure*. It is surprising with what violence these will sometimes assault the soul; how they will haunt it by night and by day; how they will intrude even into the holiest places, and interrupt our holiest services. Nor can we doubt in what light they are to be regarded, when God himself has declared an unchaste look to be the same in his sight as actual adultery[e].]

Not to enumerate any more vain thoughts, we shall rather proceed to shew,

II. The necessity of cleansing ourselves from them—

We cannot cleanse ourselves from the guilt which we have already contracted, unless we wash in "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." Nor can we purify ourselves from the pollution of sin, unless the Holy Ghost work effectually in us[f]. Yet this does not supersede the use of means; for when the text exhorts us to "wash our hearts from wickedness," it implies that,

1. It *may* be done—

[Though the power is certainly of God, yet there is much to be done by us: we should *maintain a sense of God's presence with us.* If the eye of a fellow creature, even of a child, were upon us, we should be deterred by it from the commission of many sins: how then should we be restrained from evil thoughts, if we felt a consciousness that God was privy to every imagination of our hearts!

We should *guard against the occasions of sin.* All our senses and faculties are inlets to sin, or instruments whereby we commit it. All our intercourse with each other gives occasion to evil, if we be not much on our guard against it. We may, by flattering, or worldly, or light conversation, or even by imparting to each other the workings of our hearts, stir up unhallowed passions, and suggest thoughts that may be exceedingly injurious to the soul. We should "set a watch before the door of our mouths," and

[c] 1 Cor. vii. 32. Phil. iv. 6. Matt. vi. 25—34. [d] Col. iii. 2.
[e] Matt. v. 28.
[f] To this effect we pray that "God would cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit."

and even "make a covenant with our eyes," in order to shut out evil from our own hearts, and keep from exciting it in the hearts of others.

We should *frequently meditate upon the holy Scriptures.*—David found this a good antidote to evil thoughts[g]. The Scriptures have in themselves an efficacy to purify the heart, when they are applied to us by the powerful energy of the Holy Ghost[h]: besides which, the more we are filled with holy thoughts, the less room will be left for the intrusion of evil[i]. Being intent on the promises of God, we shall more easily cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit[j].

Lastly, we should "*diligently keep our hearts*[k]." The heart is the womb in which all evils are generated[l]; and we must watch all its motions, if we would keep it pure. The very instant any evil arises there, we must expel it: if we cannot prevent its entrance, we must take care it do not "*lodge* within us."]

2. It *must* be done—

[*God notices our thoughts* as much as he does our actions[m]; and *he considers them as characterizing our state before him.* "As we think in our hearts, so are we[n];" we are either hypocritical and vile, or pure and holy, according as we indulge, or abhor, the hidden abominations of our hearts.

Thoughts as really lead to death as actions themselves do[o]: and *they may be so evil in the sight of God as to render it doubtful whether they shall ever be forgiven*[p]. They must therefore be repented of as much as actions[q]: and, if they be not repented of, they will inevitably exclude us from the kingdom of heaven. This is strongly intimated in the text, since *the mortifying of them is declared to be necessary to salvation:* and the same awful truth is taught by our Lord himself, who represents the pure in heart "as the only persons who shall see God[r]."

The very manner in which God addresses us in the text, is a very striking proof of the necessity which lies upon us to subdue the evil workings of our hearts. Wherefore is all this *tenderness in the exhortation,* but because God, who willeth not the death of a sinner, sees the fatal tendency of our evil thoughts? And wherefore this kind *impatience in the reproof,* but because he sees that the evil, if indulged, will grow upon us; and that, if not speedily suppressed, it will terminate in our ruin?

Tenderly then would we exhort you all to mark the secret motions of your hearts. In respect of *actions,* many of you, no doubt, are virtuous, and, to a certain degree, blameless. But if you will call to mind the "vain *thoughts*" that have lodged within

[g] Ps. cxix. 113. [h] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [i] See Luke xi. 24—26.
[j] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [k] Prov. iv. 23. [l] Matt. xv. 19.
[m] Ps l. 21. Ezek. xi. 5. [n] Prov. xxiii. 7. with Matt. xii. 35.
[o] Jam. i. 15. [p] Acts viii. 22. [q] ib.
[r] Matt. v. 8.

within you, you will find abundant reason to blush, and be confounded before God in dust and ashes[s]. You will see that you need the blood of Christ to cleanse you from guilt, and the Spirit of Christ to create in you a new heart, as much as the most abandoned wretch on earth; and that, unless you set yourselves in earnest to "cleanse your hands, and purify your hearts[t]," there can be no salvation for you.

Say, Beloved, when will you begin this necessary work? With a holy impatience we would urge you to begin it instantly; lest, while you are purposing amendment, you be summoned unprepared to meet your God in judgment[u].]

[s] Ps. xix. 12. Prov. xx. 9. [t] Jam. iv. 8. [u] Isai. lv. 7.

DLI.

THE MISERIES OF WAR.

Jer. iv. 19. *My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me: I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.*

THE propriety of setting apart days for national humiliation is questioned by none, except those who despise all religion, or those whose extravagant principles of liberty lead them to set at nought all human authorities. The most pious of the Jewish kings endeavoured to unite their subjects in prayer and supplication, as the best means of averting the judgments which they either felt or feared: and even heathen monarchs have resorted to it, as that which their own consciences taught them was the most likely way to obtain favour with the Most High. We have reason to be thankful that this nation is now called in the most solemn manner to humble itself before God, and to implore help from him under its present difficulties: and happy would it be for us, if the people at large laid to heart, as they ought, the calamities which we suffer, or the sins which have brought them upon us!

In the words before us, we may see what ought to be our *feelings* on this occasion, and what our *conduct*.

I. What

I. What should be our feelings—

That we may estimate aright the feelings which a state of warfare requires, let us view it,

1. As a calamity endured—

[Those who are at a distance from the scene of war, and hear of it only by battles gained or lost, are apt to overlook the miseries of their fellow-creatures, and to think of nothing but the general effect which the events may have on their national aggrandizement. But if we would form a correct judgment of this matter, let us endeavour to realize the horrors of war. Let us think of a hostile army now in our neighbourhood, and marching to attack the very place wherein we live. How would fear seize hold upon us, and "all faces gather blackness!" Read the menacing descriptions given of an advancing army by the prophets Ezekiel[a] and Joel[b]: think, from the first tidings of their approach, till you behold them just ready to spread desolation and slaughter all around them; think, I say, what your feelings would be: does the prophet exaggerate, when he compares them to the pangs of a woman travailing with her first-born child[c]? See your dearest relatives weltering in their blood; your houses spoiled; the objects of your tenderest affection treated with the most shocking indignities; and you yourselves driven, without food, without raiment, to wander in the open fields, till your exhausted nature sinks under its accumulated woes. Well may we tremble at the bare possibility of such events. Reflect then on a whole kingdom thus desolated; the hostile armies carrying fire and sword through all the towns and villages of a populous country; "A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness: yea, and nothing doth escape them:" What a day of darkness and of gloominess" must that be to the people visited with such awful calamities[d]! Say then, Brethren, what your feelings should be at this time! What if these scenes have not been acted before our eyes; are they the less to be deplored? And who can tell how soon they may be brought home to our own doors? We intreat you then to lay these things to heart, and no longer to indulge a stupid insensibility to the calamities of war.]

2. As a judgment inflicted—

[War is one of God's "four sore judgments," wherewith he visiteth a guilty land. It is he who giveth the sword a charge against this or that country[e], and "says, Sword, pass through the land[f]." And as he stirred up enemies against Solomon[g], on purpose to "avenge the quarrel of his covenant[h], so it is on

[a] Ezek. xxi. 8—17.
[b] Joel ii. 4—11.
[c] ver. 29, 31.
[d] Joel ii. 1—3.
[e] Jer. xlvii. 6, 7.
[f] Ezek. xiv. 17.
[g] 1 Kin. xi. 9, 14, 23, 26.
[h] Lev. xxvi. 25.

on account of sin that he is now laying upon us his chastising rod[i]———Nor can we doubt but that his anger has waxed hot against us, when the judgments inflicted for our sins are so various and of so long continuance. See in what terms he describes his anger against his people of old[k]! and consider whether, when its effects are so visible on us, it be not high time for us to tremble. Yes surely, the prophet's direction is exactly such as we are now called to follow[l]: and, if we refuse to follow it, we may well expect that our judgments will be multiplied, till they have wrought either our humiliation or destruction[m]. We must be stupid indeed if we do not see reason to "cry, when he is so binding us;" and to "humble ourselves under his mighty hand," when he is so correcting us.]

But it will be to little purpose to ascertain what our feelings should be, if we do not also consider,

II. What should be our conduct—

Let us make this inquiry, in reference,

1. To Ministers—

[The prophet tells us what was his conduct, to which indeed he was irresistibly impelled; "I cannot hold my peace." Ministers are watchmen, appointed by God himself to warn the people against his impending judgments. And while it is their duty to "weep between the porch and the altar," and to intercede with God to spare his heritage[n], and to "give him no rest" till he vouchsafe mercy to the land[o], it is also their duty to "lift up their voice as a trumpet, and to shew the house of Israel their sins." They must "cry aloud, and not spare[p]."

Let us not be thought harsh, if we execute our commission with fidelity and earnestness. You yourselves would be the first to condemn a sentinel who did not give you timely notice of an advancing enemy: and you will condemn us also in the eternal world, if by "prophesying smooth things" we contribute to your ruin. We must then speak, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear;" and must warn you, that nothing but present and eternal misery can be expected, whilst you continue impenitent in your sins[q]———]

2. To the people—

[Though the text does not particularly specify *your* duty, the context does, and warns you that an attention to it is the only means of quenching that wrath which is now flaming against you. The advice given you by the prophet may be comprised in three particulars: Get your obdurate hearts softened———Put away the

[i] ver. 17, 18, 22.
[k] Deut. xxxii. 23—25.
[l] ver. 8.
[m] Lev. xxvi. 27, 28.
[n] Joel ii. 17.
[o] Isai. lxii. 6, 7.
[p] Isai. lviii. 1.
[q] Luke xiii. 3, 5.

the evils which have provoked God's displeasure against you ———and, Get your hearts *thoroughly* renewed and sanctified by divine grace[r]———

We accuse not all as manifesting the same obduracy, or as loaded with the same degrees of guilt; but if all would search into their own hearts, they might find much impenitence and unbelief to mourn over, and much worldliness and carnality to put away: even those who make a profession of religion, if they would examine themselves closely as in the presence of God, might find many evil tempers and dispositions, which obstruct the efficacy of their prayers, and fearfully augment our national guilt. But if we turn not from our wickedness, it is in vain to hope that God will turn from his fiery indignation——]

ADDRESS,

1. The careless—

[This comprehends the great bulk of mankind. Whatever calamities are endured by others, they feel nothing, any farther than it immediately affects themselves. "When God's hand is lifted up, they will not see;" "nor when his judgments are in the earth, will they learn righteousness." But such indifference is most offensive to God: and they who indulge it are most likely to become signal monuments of the Divine displeasure[s]———]

2. The self-confident—

[They who see not the hand of God against them are ever leaning on an arm of flesh: if they have failed in ever so many efforts, they still look no higher than to their own exertions for success. What their views are[t], and what the declarations of God respecting them[u], may be seen in the prophecies of Isaiah. O that we may not thus provoke God to jealousy, and bring accumulated curses on our own heads, when we should be labouring by prayer and supplication to avert them[x]!———]

3. The mourners—

[We hope there are some who possess a measure of Jeremiah's patriotism and piety, and who understand by experience his exclamations in the text, "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart." Would to God that we could see such a spirit universally prevailing! There would be no doubt then of a happy termination of our troubles. Such persons indeed are too generally considered as gloomy enthusiasts: but they are the best friends of their country: they are the people who "stand in the gap;" they are the few righteous, for whose sake our Sodom has not.

[r] ver. 3, 4, 14. It will be easy to enlarge on the three points in reference to the words of the Prophet.

[s] See Amos vi. 3—7. Zeph. i. 4, 6, 12, 13—18.

[t] Isai. ix. 8—10. [u] ib. ver. 11—17. [x] Jer. xvii. 5—8.

not long since been destroyed. Go on, Beloved, like Nehemiah, Daniel, and other holy men, bewailing your own sins, and the sins of this whole nation: and then, if you should not be so happy as to see your efforts successful in relation to the kingdom at large, you may be assured that your labour will not be lost as it respects your own souls: your prayer shall return into your own bosom; and your tears be had in remembrance before God[y].

[y] Ezek. ix. 4.

DLII.

EXPOSTULATION WITH THE IMPENITENT.

Jer. viii. 4—8. *Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard; but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming: but my people know not the judgment of the Lord. How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.*

WHATEVER difference civilization may produce in the external habits of men, it makes no change in the dispositions of their minds towards God. The advantages of religious instruction may rectify their sentiments in many things, and raise the standard of morals among them; but Divine grace alone can reach their hearts, or dispose them to devote themselves to the service of their Maker. Hence the unregenerate amongst us are, in their general character, the same as they have been in all ages, and under all the different dispensations of religion. Papists and Protestants, Jews and Christians, differ only in name, and in a few outward observances; their hearts are all alike; and the same warnings and exhortations may be fitly addressed to them.

The prophet Jeremiah was commanded to expostulate with the Jews upon their *wickedness*, their *impenitence*,

penitence, their *folly*, and their *presumption*. On these same topics we would address ourselves to you. We shall not however make a formal division of our discourse, or mark our transition from one part of it to another, but shall prosecute our subject in the precise order of the words before us.

Permit me then to observe to you, that,

Men will endeavour to remedy any misfortune that has happened to them—

[" *If a man have fallen, he will arise again;*" he will not be contented to lie where he is, in a state of stupid indifference, but will exert himself to regain the posture that is better suited to his nature and pursuits. " *If a man turn out of the way,*" when prosecuting a journey of great importance, " *will he not,* as soon as he finds his error, *return,*" and get into the right path? No one can doubt what his conduct would be on such an occasion. Such is the conduct of all men in relation to temporal matters;]

But they do not act thus in reference to their souls—

[It is undeniable, that " we *have slidden back*" from God, " like a backsliding heifer" that will not submit to the yoke[a] ——— Of this we cannot but be convinced, seeing that we violate his law in unnumbered instances, and neither can, nor will, endure its restraints[b]. But, " having fallen, do we strive to arise; having turned aside, do we endeavour to return?" On the contrary, have not our " *backslidings* been *perpetual,*" without any serious endeavours to amend our ways? Had our deviations from duty been only occasional, and under the influence of some violent temptation; or had they been intermitted, with seasons of penitence and contrition; there would be something hopeful in our case: but we have been contented to continue in our devious paths, and to lie wallowing in the mire of sin.

We have even laboured to persuade ourselves that we were not so faulty as God's word represented us. We have gladly embraced any principle, that might justify this opinion; and satisfied ourselves with any excuse, that might keep us from self-reproach. When our delusions have been pointed out, and the vanity of our excuses plainly shewn, we still have " *held fast deceit,*" and have taken refuge again in the same lies, just as if they had never been at all exposed. The invitations and promises which have been held forth to us in the name of God, have produced no salutary effect: we have " pulled away the shoulder," and " *refused to return,*" and " made our faces harder than a rock[c]."

But,

[a] Hos. iv. 16. [b] Rom. viii. 7. [c] Jer. v. 3.

But, notwithstanding our obstinacy,]

God is ever looking wishfully for our return—

[" He looks down from heaven, to see if there be any that will understand and seek after him[d]." " He willeth not the death of any man, but rather that he should come to repentance and live[e]." He even swears that this is the state of his mind towards us[f]. He " *hearkens*" with more than parental anxiety; 'Cannot I *hear* some acknowledgment amongst them; cannot I hear so much as one groan, or one sigh? O that I could! O that they would suffer me to exercise mercy towards them[g]! Would they but " *speak aright*," and condemn themselves for their iniquities, I would soon shew them how gracious and merciful I am.' Thus does God listen, as it were in hopes that some will repent and turn unto him;]

But scarce any will *repent of their wickedness*, or even consider their ways—

[We hope that impenitence is not quite so universal amongst us, as among those whom the prophet addressed. We cannot quite adopt his complaint, and say that " *no man*"[h] repents. We trust there are some amongst us, who have " called their ways to remembrance," and sought for mercy in God's appointed way[h] ——— But certainly there are very few that will turn their thoughts inward, or seriously ask themselves, " *What have I done?*" Reflection is painful to the generality; and, instead of cherishing it, and setting apart seasons on purpose for it, the greater part do all they can to stifle it; they run to pleasure, to company, to business, in order to shake out of their minds all painful recollections. In all the concerns of time, they will examine carefully enough, whether they have prospered or not: nor would they be averse, in a journey through woods and forests, to compare their steps with the directory that had been given them, and to inquire occasionally whether they were in the right path. But in the concerns of their souls they harbour no doubts; they go on even in direct opposition to the strongest evidence; and take for granted that they are right, when, if they would make the smallest inquiry, they could not but find that they are in the most fatal error.]

Too many amongst us seem even to glory in their sins—

[The image by which this truth is represented in the text, is as just and beautiful as any that can be conceived. Look at the description

[d] Ps. xiv. 2. [e] 2 Pet. iii. 9. [f] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.
[g] Jer. iii. 4, 13. & xiii. 27. Hos. xi. 8.
[h] This must be amplified, or not, according to the state of the persons addressed.

description given of the war-horse in the book of Job: "He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth forth to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage; neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting[1]." What a lively representation is this of sinful man! he heareth of God's judgments, but laugheth at them: he in a measure feels them; and is only stirred up by them to a more resolute defiance of them. Destructive as sin is, he "makes a mock at it," and accounts it sport: and, whatever his ways have been, whether those of proud self-righteousness, or open profaneness, he "*turns to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*"]

In these respects they act a more irrational part than even the brute creation—

[*"The stork, the turtle, the crane, the swallow, observe"* invariably the approach of summer or of winter; and adopt measures either to escape the impending calamities, or to secure the blessings which God has prepared for them. They loiter not till the season for action is past, but avail themselves of the first intimations which they receive, to avoid the evil and obtain the good. But sinful men possess not that wisdom; they "*know not the judgment of the Lord:*" God tells them of approaching blessings, but they labour not to possess them: he warns them also of approaching miseries, but they use no means to escape them: though they feel in themselves, and behold in all around them, striking intimations of the way in which God will ultimately proceed with men, they take not one step to avert his wrath, or to conciliate his favour.]

To complete the whole, they persuade themselves that they are safe and happy—

[They call their own ways wisdom, and the conduct of those who differ from them, folly. Surprising! "*We are wise!*" Would they account any one wise that should pursue a similar conduct in reference to the things of this world? Would it be wise in a merchant never to inquire into the state of his affairs? Would it be wise in a person to reject wholesome food, and to eat nothing but what was sure to bring upon him disorders and death? Yet the folly of such persons would not be worthy to be compared with that which the inconsiderate world are guilty of, in reference to their everlasting concerns. And strange it is to say, that they will even quote the word of God, as countenancing their ways; and,

[1] Job xxxix. 21—25.

and, without once considering the true import of the passages they adduce, they will cry, "*The law of the Lord is with us*[k]." But let them bring forth their strong reasons; let them shew us from the word of God, that no "difference shall be put between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth the Lord and him that serveth him not:" let them prove to us, that a course of sin and impenitence, and an unconcern about our future state, are innocent, or at most only trifling faults, which will not be regarded in the day of judgment. Let them shew us these things from the word of God; and then we are prepared to say, "*In vain has God made it, and the pen of the scribes* (who have either recorded or expounded it) *is in vain.*" *Certainly*, if they succeed in that attempt, the Bible is the most worthless book in the universe; for men could live in sin and neglect God, without any book to direct or encourage them in such ways.]

That our expostulation may not fall to the ground, we intreat you to listen to a few words of ADVICE—

1. Consider your ways—

[This is a reasonable duty; and can do you no harm: if your conduct have been conformable with the will of God, you will have great comfort in ascertaining that it has been so: if, on the contrary, it has been such as God decidedly condemns, you will have an opportunity of altering it before it be too late———]

2. Renounce your sins—

[This must be connected with the former, and indeed must result from it[l]. You cannot but know that there has been much amiss, both in your heart and life: search it out therefore, and, whatever it may be, put it from you: if it be useful as a right hand, or precious as a right eye, spare it not, but cast it utterly away. Attempt not to justify or extenuate it; but acknowledge your criminality and danger; and cast overboard the goods that would sink the ship———]

3. Obey the Gospel—

[Sinful as your state has been, the Gospel proposes to you an infallible remedy; it sets forth a Saviour; and invites you to come to him. Obey the call: come to him, who bought you with his blood: and accept the salvation which he freely offers to the chief of sinners——— At the same time "*Be wise indeed*, and *let the word of the Lord be truly with you.*" Let "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God" be indeed the one ground of your hope, and the one rule of your conduct. Let the light which it exhibits be desired by you; and let all "your deeds be brought to it, that it may be manifest that they are wrought in God."]

[k] They will quote Prov. iii. 17. & Mic. vi. 8. [l] Ezek. xviii. 28.

DLIII.

CHRIST OUR PHYSICIAN.

Jer. viii. 22. *Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*

AS the Eastern languages in general, so the Inspired Writings in particular, abound in metaphors. In this view, they are peculiarly calculated to convey instruction; because they embody truth, as it were; they dress it in the most inviting colours, and bring it home to the mind with most commanding energy. Metaphors are of necessity founded on some acknowledged truth: if therefore the figure itself be just and apposite, the sentiment contained under it becomes so much the more luminous and impressive. The general idea intended to be conveyed in the words of our text, is this; that though God was so severely punishing the Jewish nation, he was willing to remove his judgments from them, and to restore them to his favour, if they would use the means which his Prophets had prescribed: lamentable as their state was become, they were not beyond the reach of mercy, if they would repent themselves, and turn unto their God. Now this sentiment is conveyed in metaphorical expressions; the literal import of which is, that no one with the means of recovery before him would be foolish enough to continue under the pressure of a painful and dangerous disorder. This truth every one feels and acknowledges: and consequently we must acknowledge yet more strongly the folly and wickedness of continuing under the displeasure of God, when we have at hand the certain means of deliverance from it.

To impress this thought upon your minds, we shall,

I. Shew what is that state of recovery to which God desires to bring us—

That man is disordered by means of sin, is so evident, that we scarcely need insist upon it. We justly

justly say in the general Confession of our Church, "There is no health in us:" and we may as justly apply to our state that description of the prophet Isaiah, "From the sole of our foot even to the head there is no soundness in us, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." Still however there is such a thing as a state of health: and what that is, we may learn,

1. From the condition of some who had never known sickness—

[Adam in Paradise was made after the Divine image: every perfection of the Deity, as far as it was communicable to a creature, was found in him. His dispositions were altogether in unison with the will of God. He communed with his Maker daily, as with his familiar friend; and sought all his happiness in the performance of his will, and in the enjoyment of his presence.

Our blessed Lord and Saviour also is another example of one who never knew sin. In his early years we have but little information about him, except that he was subject to his parents, and obedient to them in all things: and though we cannot consider this as *the whole* of a child's religion, we do not hesitate to say, that it is a most essential part of it, and that religion never can exist where this proof of it is wanting. When he had attained the age of twelve, we are enabled to speak determinately concerning him. Then, we know that he loved the house of God, and found all his delight in the services of religion. Yea, with such intenseness was he engaged in communicating and receiving instruction, that he let his parents go from Jerusalem without him; and, when they found him in the Temple after three days, expressed his wonder that they felt any solicitude about him, and that they did not at once conclude him to be occupied "about his Father's business." When he entered on his Ministry, he made it "his meat and drink to do his Father's will:" after labouring in his vocation the whole day, he would sometimes spend whole nights in prayer. He went about doing good amongst the poorest and vilest of mankind: and when his love was recompensed only by the most cruel insults and persecutions, he rendered nothing but good for evil: when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not: yea rather, he wept over his enemies, and prayed for his very murderers.]

2. From the condition of some who had experienced a recovery—

[We cannot easily find persons more diseased than *those to whom Peter addressed himself on the day of Pentecost*. They

had withstood all the discourses and miracles of our blessed Lord; and their hands were yet reeking with the Saviour's blood. But as soon as the grace of God reached their hearts, they were humbled for their sins, they believed in Christ as their only Saviour, they addicted themselves to the ministry of the Apostles, they felt the most cordial affection towards all the despised followers of Jesus, they sold all their possessions for the support of his Church and people, and they found all their happiness in the exercises of devotion, and the service of their God[a].

The apostle Paul is another instance of a most astonishing recovery. He had been filled with such a murderous zeal against the followers of Christ, that he "breathed out nothing but threatenings and slaughter against them." But when he was stopped in his career, he became the most zealous and active of all the Apostles. No trials could deter him from prosecuting his Master's work: he counted not his life dear unto him; yea, "if he should be offered upon the sacrifice and service of his brethren's faith," and pour out his blood as a libation for the Church, he considered it as a ground of most exalted joy and thanksgiving[b].]

3. From these instances we may learn, I say, what a state of recovery is—

[It consists, first of all, in turning to the Lord Jesus Christ, with deep humiliation, and with lively faith. It consists, next, in mortifying all those corruptions which formerly led us captive, and in devoting all our powers to the service of our God. In a word, it consists in following the steps of our adorable Emmanuel, in being "pure as he was pure," and "perfect as he was perfect." And to this it is the earnest desire of our God to bring us: "Wilt thou not be made clean?" says he; "O when shall it once be[c]?"]

Now, if God really desire to bring us to this happy state, we should,

II. Inquire, Whence it is that we do not already enjoy it?

It is not for want of adequate provision for us on the part of God—

[God himself appeals to us respecting this: "Is there not balm in Gilead? Is there not a Physician there?" Has not God sent us a Physician from heaven, even his only dear Son, who perfectly knows the extent of our disorders, and is able to prescribe a remedy for them? Other physicians find their remedies in the productions of nature and of art; but this blessed Physician "heals his people with his own stripes:" he shed his own

[a] Acts ii. 41—47. [b] Phil. ii. 17, 18. [c] Jer. xiii. 27.

own precious blood for us upon the cross, that it might be applied, as a sovereign balm, to our souls, to restore us to perfect health. And now we appeal to all of you; Is there any want of skill in this Physician, or any want of virtue in this balm? Have not thousands and millions of persons, dying of the malady of sin, experienced a perfect restoration of health through the application of the blood of Christ to their souls? Is there any reason to doubt, but that it would be as efficacious for you, as for them? And is not this remedy offered you "without money and without price?"

Behold then, ye are witnesses for God this day, that no blame attaches to him, and that the continuance of your maladies can in no respect be imputed to him.]

It is altogether owing to yourselves,

1. You do not believe that your disorders are so great and fatal as God has represented them—

[That sin has in a measure disordered your souls, you will readily acknowledge; but that your diseases are mortal, and that you must die to all eternity if they be not healed, you do not believe. We ask only what you would do, if you felt within yourselves a bodily disorder, which you were certain would destroy your life in a few hours if a remedy were not instantly applied? Would you not send for a physician without delay, and be in the utmost solicitude till he arrived for your relief? Why then is there not all this anxiety about your souls? Why are you not seeking the Lord Jesus Christ with your whole hearts? Our Lord assigns the true reason; "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" and you feel no need of him, because you are not duly sensible of your sickness.]

2. You do not like the prescriptions which the good Physician has appointed for you—

[*Repentance* is regarded by you as a bitter pill, which you are very averse to take. *Faith in the atoning blood of Christ* is so humiliating, that you cannot make up your minds to submit to it: you think that you may be excused going to him with all that contrition and self-renunciation which the Gospel requires. "*The living henceforth, not to yourselves, but unto him,*" and "the having your whole selves, body, soul, and spirit sanctified" and devoted to the Lord, is also regarded by you as an insufferable restraint. You would be far better pleased to be left in possession of those gratifications which are pleasing to your corrupt nature, and which foster the most deadly diseases of your souls.]

3. You hope for some more convenient season for returning to your God—

[You have a general persuasion that you must experience a change

change before you go hence; but you wish to put it off to some future period. You are too young at present, or have too many engagements; and you think a time of sickness will be more favourable to reflection; and, as God has shewn mercy to many in their last hours, you hope he may to you. This completes what the other errors have begun. This lulls you asleep in fatal security. If ignorance slays its thousands, this procrastinating habit slays its ten thousands.]

Having shewn you the true Reasons why your health is not recovered, I would impress the subject yet further on your minds, by asking two QUESTIONS;

1. Would not the recovery of your souls tend to your *present* happiness?

[Grant, that the votary of pleasure obtains all that he seeks after; is not he who has his sins forgiven, his corruptions mortified, his soul transformed into the Divine image, the sting of death removed, and a glorious inheritance secured to him, the happier man? ——— We will abide the decision of your own consciences.]

2. Will not the consequence of dying in your present diseased state be terrible?

[Terrible it will be to all; but most of all to those who have their diseases faithfully pointed out to them, and the heavenly Physician brought before them. O how pungent will that question be to them in the day of judgment, "Why were not *ye* recovered? *ye*, who had the balm of Gilead freely offered you, and who withstood the most pressing solicitations to accept of mercy?"! O that ye may be wise in time! and that, instead of having *then* to regret the opportunities you have lost, you may *now* be enabled to say with the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thy diseases!"]

DLIV.

FORTITUDE RECOMMENDED ON THE SIDE OF TRUTH.

Jer. ix. 3. Middle clause. *They are not valiant for the truth upon the earth.*

IT is by no means uncommon to see men valiant in their country's cause, or fearless in the commission of iniquity. But courage on the side of religion is a quality but rarely seen. This virtue attaches not

not itself to strength of nerves, nor is it a necessary attendant on constitutional intrepidity. It is a grace produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit; and is found equally to adorn the weaker as the stronger sex. The want of natural courage is a fault in those only who enter into professions where the exercise of it is essential to a proper discharge of their duty: but the want of spiritual valour is a crime, for which we must answer before God; yea, it is a great and heinous crime, for which we have reason to dread his heaviest judgments. The prophet, when enumerating the sins which prevailed among the Jews, and which caused him to weep over them day and night, mentions this as one that called for his severest reprehension; namely, that when they could "proceed with undaunted effrontery from evil to evil," they "were not valiant for the truth upon the earth."

In illustrating these words, we propose to shew,

I. That valour is requisite on the side of truth—

Let "truth" be taken in the lowest sense, as meaning nothing more than common justice and equity, and there will still be found need of valour for the maintenance of it in the world. Let a magistrate set himself vigorously to reform abuses, and he will soon find that vice and profaneness will maintain a violent contest against him, and that he has need of courage to carry his plans into full effect.

But if we understand "the truth" as comprehending the whole extent of our duty not only as men but as Christians, our need of valour in maintaining it will be still more apparent. We stand in need of it,

1. To profess the truth—

[Who does not know that a profession of religion subjects us to contempt? What was said of the Christians of the first ages, is equally true at this day; "We know that this sect is everywhere spoken against." Men will "gaze strangely at us, as soon as we cease to run with them into their excess of riot[a]." As soon as we "depart from evil, we make ourselves a prey[b]," which every one feels himself at liberty to hunt. What the Gibeonites

[a] 1 Pet. iv. 4. [b] Isai. lix. 15.

Gibeonites experienced, when they made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel, is a striking emblem of what must be expected by all who submit to Jesus, and associate themselves with his people[c] — — — And does it not require courage to endure this? — — — Verily, there are many who would find it easier to walk up to the mouth of a cannon, than to brave the contempt and obloquy to which a profession of religion would expose them.]

2. To practise it—

[Let a person be solicited by his friends to unite with them in courses which he disapproves; let him be ridiculed as indulging needless scrupulosity and preciseness, or perhaps as hypocritically pretending to more sanctity than his neighbours; will he find it easier to be stedfast in his obedience to God, dissembling no truth, omitting no duty, conforming to nothing dubious or sinful? Will he need no courage to stem the torrent, to disregard the appearances of singularity, and to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man? — — —]

3. To recommend and enforce it—

[The Gospel enjoins us, not only to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them." Now we know what have been the consequences of such faithfulness in all ages; "I hate Micaiah, because he doth not speak good concerning me, but evil:" "The world hateth me, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil[d]." And is it a light matter to encounter the hatred of our friends, and relatives, yea, and of the whole world? When we foresee these consequences, are we in no danger of withholding the admonitions and instructions which we ought to give? Are we in no danger of "putting our light under a bushel," when we know what offence will be taken at us, if we suffer it to shine forth? Are we under no temptation to indulge that "fear of man which bringeth a snare?"]

If we cannot recommend, or practise, or even profess religion, without valour, we can have no doubt about,

II. The duty of exercising it—

It is a duty we owe,

1. To God—

[God has not told us to obey his commandments only as far as the world would approve, but to "follow him fully," and to love and serve him with our whole hearts. Will he then be contented to see us "partial in the law?" Will he accept our plea,

[c] Josh. x. 3, 4. [d] John vii. 7.

plea, if we urge our fear of man as a reason for our not fearing and obeying *him?* No: he has bidden us "not to fear man, who can only kill the body; but to fear *him*, who can destroy both body and soul in hell[e]."]

2. To our neighbours—

[What will they think of religion, if they see us who profess it violating its most sacred obligations through fear of offending man? Will they not imagine that it is not worth contending for? Will they not be emboldened to shew the same preference to the world that we do; and to regard the opinions of men more then the commands of God? On the contrary, Would not a firm, bold, decided conduct tend to convince them, that God is worthy to be served, and that "his loving-kindness is better than life itself?"]

3. To ourselves—

[Our own everlasting welfare depends upon our stedfastness in the ways of God. "If we are ashamed of him, he will be ashamed of us:" "if we deny him, he will deny us:" "if we draw back, it will be unto perdition; for his soul can have no pleasure in us:" "he only that overcometh, shall inherit all things;" and "he only that endureth unto the end, shall ever be saved." If then we have any regard for our own souls, we must be valiant, and "quit ourselves like men:" for if even life itself be suffered to stand in competition with his will, our souls will be forfeited and lost for ever[f].]

It is not however sufficient to possess valour: we should also understand,

III. In what way it should be exercised—

Here we are very liable to err: true Christian valour should be shewn,

1. In meek and patient sufferings—

[Passive valour is by far the most valuable. Would we see it illustrated? let us see how it operated in the Apostle Paul: "being defamed, says he, we intreat; being persecuted, we suffer." Would we behold the most striking exemplification of it that ever existed? let us behold Jesus, who had just before evinced his power over his enemies by striking them all to the ground with a word, yielding up himself to them, and led as a sheep to the slaughter; behold him "dumb before them, even as a sheep before her shearers; giving his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and not hiding his face from shame and spitting:" "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself

[e] Luke xii. 4, 5. [f] Matt. x. 39.

himself unto him that judgeth righteously:" yes, here was precisely the valour which we are called to exercise. We must "possess our souls in patience," and "let patience have its perfect work." If once we recede from this ground, we are vanquished. If we would "not be overcome of evil, we must overcome evil with good."]

2. In firm and steady perseverance—

[Obedience to God is the great point: to that we must adhere at all events. We must resemble Daniel and the Hebrew youths, and determine to suffer the most cruel death, rather than violate the dictates of our conscience[g], or neglect any known duty whatsoever[h]. Next to our blessed Lord, St. Paul perhaps endured more for the truth's sake than any of the children of men: in every place, bonds and afflictions abode him: but "none of those things could move him, neither counted he his life dear unto him, so that he might but fulfil the ministry" committed to him: he was "willing not only to be bound, but also to die," at any place; at any time, and in any manner, for his Master's sake: when he had been stoned and left for dead, at Lystra, he returned again speedily to that very city, regardless of his own life, and intent only on executing the commission which he had received of the Lord Jesus[i]? Thus must we go on, "stedfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord:" and in such a course we shall approve ourselves "good soldiers of Jesus Christ."]

We would add to what has been said, a word,

1. Of caution—

[Let not any imagine that Christian fortitude at all militates against the duties which we owe to our parents, or to any that are placed in authority over us. Many are apt to mistake pertness and forwardness as marks of valour: but "they know not what spirit they are of;" they are, in fact, displeasing God as much as man, while they indulge a petulant, forward disposition. We need look well to ourselves in this particular, and see that we are not gratifying our own self-will, under a pretended regard for the commands of God. We should never forget the respect due to our superiors: and when we are forced to act contrary to their commands, we should strive as much as possible to conciliate them in our manner of doing it; and shew them, that our opposition to their will is not a matter of choice, but of necessity.]

2. Of encouragement—

[None need to fear, as though they should not be able to act valiantly in the hour of trial: for God has promised, that we shall not be tempted above our ability to withstand, or without a way for us to escape[k]. We are told of women, who, under the most grievous

[g] Dan. iii. 16—18. [h] Dan. vi. 10. [i] Acts xiv. 8, 19, 21.
[k] 1 Cor. x. 13.

grievous sufferings for conscience sake, would not accept deliverance when it was offered as an inducement to recede from their principles[l]. We need not fear therefore but that "*our* strength also shall be according to our day[m]." God will "strengthen us by his Spirit in our inward man, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness;" and "his strength shall be perfected in our weakness." In the weakest amongst us shall that promise be exemplified, "They that do know their God, shall be strong, and do exploits[n]."]

[l] Heb. xi. 35. [m] Deut. xxxiii. 25. [n] Dan. xi. 32.

DLV.

THE CONTEMPT WITH WHICH GOD'S RICHEST MERCIES ARE TREATED.

Jer. xiii. 11. *As the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory:—but they would not hear.*

IT pleased God in former times frequently to instruct his people by signs, as being more calculated to awaken the attention of those who were but, as children, slow to understand the plainest declarations of his word. Sometimes those signs were represented to the prophets in visions; as when Ezekiel was taken up by the hair of his head, and carried to the north gate of the Temple to see all the wickedness that was transacted in the sanctuary; the thing was done only in a vision[a]: at other times the prophets actually did the things which were to be signs to the people; as when Ezekiel, for the space of three hundred and ninety days, reclined on his right side, with a representation of Jerusalem before him, to figure to the Jews the siege that should assuredly be formed against it by the Chaldeans[b]. Whether the sign which Jeremiah was here directed to use was in a vision only, or in reality, Commentators are not

[a] Ezek. viii. 3.

[b] Ezek. iv. 1—17. A most surprising account altogether! See also Ezek. xii. 2—12. & xxiv. 15—24.

not agreed. Certainly the going repeatedly several hundred miles only to carry a girdle to the Euphrates and bring it back again, seems a labour unlikely to be imposed upon him: but on the other hand, that very labour might tend the more powerfully to awaken the attention of the Jews to the subject which was thus emblematically represented to them: and it is safer, on the whole, to take literally the Scripture account in all cases where reason and common sense do not necessitate us to understand it figuratively[c].

The sign here used by the prophet was this. He took a girdle, and, after wearing it some time, carried it to the river Euphrates, and hid it there in the hole of a rock; and then, after a considerable lapse of time, he went and fetched it back again, and exhibited it to the people in its decayed state; declaring that they, notwithstanding their present strength and power, should ere long be reduced to the lowest ebb of misery by the Chaldeans; because when God had formed them for himself, they had refused to adhere to him, or to regard his overtures of love and mercy.

Such is the explanation given us by God himself in the words of our text; which, whilst they elucidate the emblem used by the prophet, will naturally lead me to shew you,

I. The honour which God has designed for his people—

The primary use of a girdle is to bind up the garments around the loins—

[In conformity with this idea, God had caused his people to cleave to him, that they might be, as it were, in continual contact with him. This he had caused them to do, when he brought them out of Egypt, and made them altogether dependent on himself for direction, preservation, and support. In like manner he may be said to have caused us also to cleave to him, having in our very birth imposed on us a necessity to depend upon him for life, and breath and all things; for "in him we live, and move, and have our being." Our proper state is that of a little infant clinging to its mother, or, as our text

[c] Such an instance occurs, Jer. xxv. 27.

text expresses it, "a girdle cleaving to the loins of a man." We should at all times be "taking hold of God by prayer[d]," and by faith uniting ourselves to him, so as to be one with him, and he with us. If this was the duty and privilege of the Jews, much more is it ours; because our God and Saviour has actually assumed our nature, and become bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh: nay more, by the fuller communication of his Spirit he "dwells in us," and lives in us, and is "our very life[e];" so that they who are joined unto him by faith are "one Spirit with him[f]." This then, I say, is the honour which God designs for us: he would have us all renouncing every kind and degree of creature-dependence, and to live as nigh to him, and cleave as close to him, as a girdle to the loins of a man; yea, in spite of every opposition and discouragement, he would have us "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart[g]."]

But a girdle is also of use for ornament—

[And to this our text has especial respect. The girdle of the high priest was, as it is repeatedly called, "a *curious* girdle," given him "for glory and for beauty[h]:" and our great High Priest desires that we should be to him what that curious girdle was to Aaron. Vile and worthless as we are in ourselves, he would form and fashion us anew, interweaving in our very nature all the graces of his Spirit, and transforming us into the very image of our God in righteousness and true holiness. Surrounded by us, he would esteem himself more richly adorned than with the brightest jewels[i], and more enriched than with all the treasures of the universe[k]. It appears almost impious to say, that such ornaments would be a *glory* to our God and Saviour; yet we will venture to affirm that they would be so regarded by our Lord himself, who says, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them[l]." What a royal diadem is to an earthly monarch, that are we designed to be to the King of kings and Lord of lords[m]. As Christ was "the image of the invisible God," because God who is invisible in his own nature was visible in him[n], so are we according to the measure of grace given unto us: we are to "shine as lights in the world, holding forth" in our whole deportment "the word of life[o];" we are made his on purpose that we may "shew forth his *virtues*[p];" we are to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men[q];" and shewing in the whole of our spirit and temper what the will of the Lord is: we are to "have the same mind as was in him[r]," and to "be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as

[d] Isai. lxiv. 7. [e] Col. iii. 4. [f] 1 Cor. vi. 17. [g] Acts xi. 23.
[h] Exod. xxviii. 4, 8, 40. [i] Mal. iii. 17.
[k] Exod. xix. 5, 6. with 1 Pet. ii. 9.
[l] John xvii. 10. See also John xv. 8. & Isai. lxi. 3.
[m] Isai. lxii. 3. [n] Col. i. 15. [o] Phil. ii. 15, 16.
[p] 1 Pet. ii. 9. See the marginal reading.
[q] 2 Cor. iii. 3. [r] Phil. ii. 5.

as by the Spirit of the Lord[s]." This will surely become our state, if once we cleave, like a girdle, unto him: and all who see us shall be constrained to "glorify our Father who is in heaven[t]."]

Who would conceive, that when such honour is offered unto man, there should be found a creature in the universe unwilling to accept it? Yet the sequel of our text leads us to shew,

II. The way in which this honour is contemned—

The melancholy testimony that was almost invariably borne against the Jews was, that "they would not hear[u]"—

[See how they conducted themselves in relation to the very offer before us! "they refused to hear God's words, and walked in the imagination of their own hearts, and worshipped and served other gods[x]."]

And what can be a more just description of ourselves?

[Unspeakable as the honour is which God desires to confer upon us, we will not seek it at his hands: we are, like those who were invited to the wedding-feast, all with one consent making excuses, and pleading the urgency of our worldly affairs as a reason for neglecting our spiritual concerns[y]. If we bow not down to stocks and stones, we "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator[z]." We have idols in our hearts; and to those we dedicate all our powers and faculties, whether of soul or body. We are justly characterized as "walking after the imagination of our own hearts[a]:" each serves the god that suits him best. One follows all his vicious propensities, and seeks his happiness in sensual indulgence: another grasps after riches; another aspires after honour; another affects rather the more refined pleasures of science and philosophy: but all by nature, however differing in their particular pursuits, agree in this, that they "are of the world, and not of God;" and that they "seek honour from man, and not the honour that cometh of God only." They need no exhortation to cleave unto worldly vanities; *that* they do naturally of themselves: and if we could point out to them how to come in closer contact with the objects of their ambition, and how to secure to themselves a larger measure of them, we should find them very attentive to our counsels. But when we exhort them to cleave only to the Lord, they have no ears to hear us, no disposition to regard us. In vain do we expatiate upon the honour which God designs for them; *that* appears to them no better

[s] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [t] Matt. v. 16.
[u] Compare with the text, Jer. vi. 16, 17. [x] ver. 10.
[y] Luke xiv. 16—20. [z] Rom. i. 25. [a] See Isai. liii. 6.

better than "a cunningly devised fable,"[a] or at best as a subject that may well be deferred to a more convenient season. "Though we call them to the Most High, none at all will exalt him[b]?" so that God may complain of us as he did of his people of old, "All the day long have I stretched out my hands to a rebellious and gainsaying people[c]."]

ADDRESS,

1. In a way of appeal—

[We may justly say to you, "What more could have been done for you than God has done[d]?" and wherefore do you so requite him? Judge, all of you, between God and your own souls, and say what such conduct merits at his hands. I will tell you in God's name what you may assuredly expect. Behold the girdle when it was brought back from the river Euphrates, how "marred and worthless" it was[e]: see too how that emblematic judgment has been executed on the Jewish nation, not only in their Babylonish captivity, but in their present dispersion, where they are "a hissing and an astonishment" to all the rest of the world. So will God's indignation against you be manifested on account of the contempt you pour upon him; according to that express declaration of his, "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." As they who made light of his invitation were "not suffered even to taste of his supper[f]," so you shall never taste of that honour and happiness which he offers to you: and as they were shut out into outer darkness, so will you at the last day awake "to shame and everlasting contempt[g]."]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Nothing does God desire more, than to take even the vilest of mankind, and bind them to him as a girdle. Yes, there is not one so worthless, but he should be made a partaker of this honour, if only he would comply with the invitations of his God. O that every one of us might now obey his voice; and that he would "make us willing in the day of his power!" Would you see more clearly what God would do for you? This same prophet tells you without a figure, that "he will pardon all your iniquities" that ever you have committed, and so load you with his benefits, that all who behold you shall be filled with utter astonishment at his goodness to you[h]. Only resist not his strivings with you, but "run after him when he draws you," and beg him to "fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, even the work of faith with power: then shall the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in you, and ye shall be glorified in, and with him, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ[i]."]

[b] Hos. xi. 7. [c] Rom. x. 21. [d] Isai. v. 3, 4. [e] ver. 7.
[f] Luke xiv. 24. [g] Dan. xii. 2. [h] Jer. xxxiii. 8, 9.
[i] 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

DLVI.

GOD IS DESIROUS OF SAVING MEN.

Jer. xiii. 27. *Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be?*

THROUGHOUT all the sacred writings we behold the goodness and severity of God: sometimes the one attracts our notice, and sometimes the other; and in many places, as in that before us, we are struck with the union and combination of them both. Jerusalem was the city of the living God, the residence of his peculiar people; yet he denounces woe against them: but at the same time he declares, in very pathetic language, the ardent desires of his soul to exercise mercy towards them.

From these most affecting words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. The woes which impenitent sinners have reason to expect—

This is a painful, but necessary, subject of our inquiries—

The punishment that awaits sinners is most tremendous—

[The loss of heaven is one part of it: and who shall declare how great a loss this is? ——— The miseries of hell (which is the other part) are equally beyond the powers of language to describe, or of imagination to conceive ———]

This, however, the impenitent have but too much reason to expect—

[" Woe unto thee!" says my text: and this is the voice of reason[a] ——— of Scripture[b] ——— of experience[c] ——— of the compassionate Saviour himself[d] ——— What stronger evidence can any man wish for? and how blind must he be that is not convinced by it!]

But

[a] There must be a difference between the righteous and the wicked.

[b] Against ten thousand passages to this effect, there is not one syllable that has an opposite aspect.

[c] The union of sin and misery is felt by all. Where is there a sinner that is truly happy? See Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

[d] See how often woe is denounced, Matt. xxiii. 13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29, 33.

But however merited and awful these woes are, we see from the text,

II. How unwilling God is to inflict them—

He complains of men's obstinacy in rejecting the overtures of his mercy—

[It is their sin only that exposes them to his displeasure: were that once removed, he would "rejoice over them to do them good." And whence is it that they are not cleansed from it? Has not God provided such means for their cleansing, as should certainly be effectual, if only they were applied? Has he not opened a fountain to cleanse them from guilt[e]? ——— Has he not promised to sprinkle them with water that should purify and renew their very inmost souls[f]? ——— Yes: but they are averse to that purification: they hate the very means by which it is to be attained, and the regimen whereby it is to be preserved——— God would gladly effect the work for them, if only they would submit to it; but they will not[g]. Hence those complaints so often uttered by the Prophets[h], and by Christ himself[i]———]

He expresses also an impatient longing for an opportunity to bless their souls—

[Long has he waited to no purpose: yet still "he waiteth to be gracious unto us:" "he stands at the door of our hearts, and knocks." His address to us is, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Every day appears to him an age[k]: he is at a loss, as it were, what to do, whether to give us up, or to use any further means[l]. The complaint in the text is scarcely less the language of despondency, than of compassion; "When shall it once be?" It is as though he said, "My patience is almost exhausted: your return to me is the most earnest desire of my soul: but I fear I shall be forced, in spite of all my efforts to save you, to abandon you at last, and to execute the judgments which you so obstinately provoke."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who imagine that they have no need of cleansing—

[What Child of man has not need to be cleansed from that taint which we inherit from our first parents[m]? And who has not contracted

[e] Zech. xiii. 1. 1 John i. 7. [f] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
[g] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.
[h] Ps. lxxxi. 11—13. Jer. vii. 23—26.
[i] John v. 40. Matt. xxiii. 37.
[k] Hos. viii. 5. Jer. xv. 6. "I am weary with repenting."
[l] Hos. vi. 4. & xi. 8. Jer. iii. 4, 19.
[m] Job xiv. 4. & xv. 14. & xxv. 4.

contracted much moral defilement by means of actual transgression? ——— Let none entertain such proud conceits. The best amongst us, no less than the worst, need to be washed in the blood of Christ, and be renewed by his Spirit; and without this cleansing, must inevitably perish.]

2. Those who are unwilling to be cleansed—

[Many are unwilling to part with even the grossest lusts. What then must we say to them? Must we speak peace to them, instead of denouncing woes? If we were to do so, God would not confirm our word: so that we should only delude them to their ruin. But indeed they themselves would not be deluded by any such assertions: for, with whatever confidence they utter them themselves, they would not endure to hear them if uttered from the pulpit.

But it is not gross sin only that must be put away: we must be "cleansed also from secret faults:" whatever stops short of this, is ineffectual. The right hand, the right eye, must be sacrificed; and the whole heart be turned unto God ———]

3. Those who desire the cleansing of their souls—

[It is of infinite importance that you seek this blessing aright. It is not in floods of tears that you are to be cleansed; though floods of tears are proper and desirable: it is the blood of Christ alone that can cleanse from the guilt of sin; and the Spirit of Christ alone that can cleanse from the power and pollution of sin. To apply these effectually, we must embrace the promises, and rest upon them, trusting in God to accomplish them to our souls. We must not first cleanse ourselves, and then embrace God's promises of mercy; but first lay hold on the promises, and then, by virtue derived from them, proceed to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit[n]."]

[n] 2 Cor. vii. 1. with Acts xv. 9.

DLVII.

A PATTERN FOR NATIONAL HUMILIATION.*

Jer. xiv. 7—9. *O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake; for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee: O the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a way-faring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name: leave us not.*

NATIONAL

* For a Fast-Day—Drought, &c.

NATIONAL humiliation is the only mean of averting national judgments: it is that which God himself has prescribed; and to which he has often given the most signal success. The repentance, and consequent deliverance, of Nineveh, an heathen nation, stands as an encouragement to all the kingdoms of the earth. The instances of God's regard to the united supplications of his people are so numerous, that it has ever been judged expedient to appoint days for general fasting and prayer, in seasons of great calamity. Surely such an appointment was never more necessary than now! To assist you in improving this solemn occasion, we shall propose to your imitation the Jews, who, in a season of grievous drought and famine, humbled themselves before God.—In the words before us, we see,

I. Their humble acknowledgments—

Conscious of having merited the Divine judgments, they confessed their guilt—

And may not we justly adopt their language as our own?

["We have sinned against God" as much as any people upon earth; "our backslidings have been very many," and "our iniquities do indeed testify against us."[a] Look through the land; see what profaneness everywhere abounds!———We have indeed professed on many solemn fast-days to repent, and turn unto the Lord; but our humiliation has not survived the day appointed for it, nor has any national reformation been visible amongst us———If we enter, every one of us, into our own hearts, we may see an epitome of all that is passing in the world: we may say with the Psalmist, "My heart sheweth me the wickedness of the ungodly"———What ingratitude for mercies, what impenitence under sin, what unmindfulness of God's presence, what disregard of his word, what evil dispositions, corrupt affections, and vile propensities, may be laid to our charge!———Let any one say, Whether these, and innumerable other sins, do not testify against him———We would hope that there are but few amongst us who have not resolved, and for a time endeavoured, to repent: but has not our "goodness been as the morning-cloud, or the early dew that passeth away?" Have not our "backslidings been multiplied?" And could we have thought, some years ago, that we should have made so small a progress in the Divine life, or, perhaps, that we should at this day

[a] Ps. xxxvi. 1. Prayer-Book Translation.

day have been as far from God as ever? ——— Let us then make these acknowledgments to God with most unfeigned contrition, and lie before him in dust and ashes.]

With equal propriety also we may imitate,

II. Their mournful expostulations—

Nothing indeed can be more offensive to God than arrogant expostulations[b]; but nothing more acceptable than such as are presented with unfeigned humility—

Such were those with which the Jewish penitents addressed the Lord—

[The titles, by which they address the Deity, are expressive of the deepest reverence: God is indeed the Hope, the *only* "Hope of his people:" and he is their *willing* and *all-sufficient* "Saviour in the time of trouble." Nor did they intend to question either his *inclination* or *ability* to save them; but only to say, Wilt thou be like a stranger that cares not for us; or like one, who, though mighty in himself, is yet, through perturbation of his mind, or the insuperable difficulty of the case, unable to afford succour? Similar expostulations were frequently used by David[c]; and however they may at first sight appear expressive of too great familiarity, are indeed the genuine effusions of a contrite soul—]

Let us approach our God in terms of like import—

[To whom can we look as our "Hope," but Jehovah? and who but he has been our "*Saviour in times of trouble?*" But, alas! He is at present but as "a stranger in the land, or as a mighty man that cannot save." We have cried to him, and we are not delivered: though he has graciously interposed on some occasions, yet still we are left in deep affliction; nor can we at all divine what shall be the issue of our troubles. The greater part of us too, we fear, are no less in doubt respecting the issue of their *spiritual* conflicts: If they have ever cried to God, their enemies yet prevail; and it is uncertain whether they shall not finally be overwhelmed by sin and Satan. With what earnestness then should *they* look to Christ, as to "*the hope* set before them," and plead with him as their *Saviour* in this hour of need!]

But to their expostulations let us not forget to add,

III. Their fervent petitions—

The penitents before us seemed conscious as well of their unworthiness as of their impotency—

Hence, both in their petitions and their pleas, they

[b] Isai. lviii. 3. [c] Ps. xliv. 23—27. & lxxiv. 10, 11.

they expressed their entire reliance upon God's grace and mercy—

[Sensible, that if God forsook them, or refused his aid, they must perish, they cried, "Leave us not!" "Do thou it" which we desire: and having no goodness or worthiness of their own to plead, they intreated him "for his name's sake," and because of his presence with them, and his relation to them; "Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name: leave us not!"]

A more excellent pattern for our imitation we cannot find—

[What can we do *as a nation*, if God forsake us, or withhold his powerful interposition? In vain will our fleets and armies go forth to meet the enemy, if God be not with them, to succeed their efforts. But can we plead the superior piety of our nation? Is there any thing in the land so excellent, that we can urge it with God as a ground whereon we may expect his favour? Alas! the superior light of which we boast, and the distinguished blessings which we enjoy, have greatly aggravated our national guilt: we can therefore ask nothing but mercy, for mercy's sake. It is true, "God is still (blessed be his name!) in the midst of us;" and while our enemies have professedly cast off their allegiance to him, we glory in being "called by his name." In this view we may plead his presence with us, and his relation to us; yet not in a spirit of proud boasting, but of humble and thankful acknowledgment. And the more God is honoured in the midst of us, the more may we expect a continuance of his favour towards us.

It is almost needless to observe, that, with respect to our *personal* necessities, we must have no other plea than that before mentioned. He must be ignorant indeed who will presume to ground his hopes upon any merit of his own; though certainly, if we belong to God, we may plead his past mercies as a ground on which we hope for the continuance and increase of them. In this manner therefore let us approach our God; and we may rest assured that our supplications shall not go forth in vain.]

APPLICATION—

[Let this day be truly set apart for the humbling of your souls before God— — —And let the pattern now set before you be not only approved, but imitated in all its parts. There is a day coming when we shall either look back upon our present humiliation with unspeakable comfort, or regret bitterly that we trifled with God and our own souls. Defer not then this necessary work. The nation, of which you are members, demands it of you. Whatever be your judgment with respect to politics, there can be no doubt but that you have contributed

to

to augment the guilt of the nation, and are therefore bound to deprecate the judgments that are hanging over it. The salvation of your own souls too depends on your unfeigned repentance; and the sooner you turn to God in his appointed way, the sooner will you obtain a sense of his favour, and the brighter will be your prospects of the heavenly world. Let us all then turn to Christ, as the Hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof; and however unable or unwilling to save we may have foolishly supposed him, we shall find him both "able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

DLVIII.

HOW TO PLEAD WITH GOD.

Jer. xiv. 20, 21. *We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, break not thy covenant with us.*

"LORD, teach us to pray," was the request of the Apostles to their Lord and Master: and may Almighty God teach us to pray, whilst we consider the passage we have just read. Here is prayer *indeed*, such as it becomes us all to offer; and such as we shall surely offer, if ever we be duly sensible of our state before God. It was offered by the prophet in a season of great affliction. The whole land was in the utmost distress by reason of a drought, which put a total stop to vegetation, and destroyed all the fruits of the earth: and the prophet was assured, that that distress would speedily become extreme by means of the Chaldeans, who would invade the country, and desolate Jerusalem with the sword and famine. Under these circumstances, he was commanded not to pray for the people, since the measure of their iniquities was full[a]. But, like Moses of old[b], the prophet could not forbear: he first indeed warned the people of the judgments which God was about to inflict upon them[c], and then, in a most earnest and humble manner, pleaded with God in their behalf[d].

We

[a] ver. 10, 11.
[b] Exod. xxxii. 10, 11.
[c] ver. 15—18.
[d] ver. 19—22.

We propose,

I. To explain this prayer of the prophet—

His *acknowledgments* are plain and easy to be understood—

[He confesses, as he might well do, the sins of the whole nation; as well those contracted by their ancestors, as those which they had themselves committed: and he intreats God "not to abhor them" on account of their extreme wickedness. Now this expression, whilst it marked his sense of their vileness, had particular reference to what God himself had *threatened* by Moses, and to what he had *promised* also in the event of their humbling of themselves before him[e]. Hence, in the verse before the text, the prophet asks, "Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul *lothed Zion?*"]

His *pleas* require some explanation—

[Being exceedingly earnest in his petitions, he offers the most powerful pleas that could possibly be urged: he intreats God to have mercy on them for his own sake, and to shew regard to the *honour of his name*, the *glory of his administration*, and the *sanctity of his engagements*.

The first of these pleas, the honour of God's name, is frequently urged in the Holy Scriptures[f], and is particularly acceptable to God; who "is jealous for his holy name[g]," and delights to "sanctify it" in the sight of an ungodly world[h].

The second of these pleas involves in it somewhat of greater difficulty. The words, "Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory," are generally interpreted as importing no more than this; "Do not give up thy city and temple into the hands of the enemy." The words will undoubtedly bear this sense: for both the city and the temple are represented as God's throne[i]; and he threatens to give them up into the hands of his enemies to be polluted and defiled by them[k]. But, if we attend to the manner in which this petition is introduced, we shall see that it is, like that which precedes, and that which follows it, *a plea;* in which view its sense will be, "Thou art our King, who art engaged to provide for and protect thy people; and if thou give up the city and the temple into the hands of our enemies, as thou hast threatened, thy government will be dishonoured; and they will say, that thou art not able to afford them the succour which thou hast promised them." In this view the passage exactly accords with the plea urged by Moses[l], and with that also which

[e] Lev. xxvi. 10—12. with 27—30.; in both of which passages especial mention is made of famine as connected with God's abhorrence.
[f] Josh. vii. 9. Ps lxxix. 9, 10. [g] Ezek. xxxix. 25.
[h] Ezek. xxxvi. 21—23.
[i] Jer. iii. 17. & xvii. 12. See this latter in particular.
[k] Ezek. vii. 21, 22. [l] Numb. xiv. 13—16.

which Jeremiah himself has urged more fully, and in the very same connexion, in the preceding part of this chapter[m].

The last of these pleas reminds God of his covenant, which he cannot, and will not, break. This must doubtless refer to the covenant of grace, which God made with Abraham and with all his believing people to the end of time[n]. The *national* covenant that was made with Moses was broken, and annulled; because all the conditions of it had been violated: but "the better covenant" which was made with God in Christ, is "ordered in all things and sure[o];" and by it "the promise is made sure to all the seed[p]." That covenant is "confirmed by the oath of Jehovah, that by two immutable things, in which *it is impossible for God to lie*, *we* might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us[q]." This covenant God had engaged never to break[r]; and therefore the prophet urged the inviolability of it as a motive with God to fulfil to his people, notwithstanding their unworthiness, all which of his own grace and mercy he had promised to them. In this view God himself had promised to regard his covenant[s]: and in this view the plea in our text may be considered as expressing what is more diffusely stated by the prophet Isaiah[t].]

Having stated what may be considered as the import of the prayer, we proceed,

II. To point out some important lessons contained in it—

We shall confine ourselves to two;

1. The true nature of a sinner's humiliation—

[Nothing can give us a more just idea of humiliation than the prophet's expression of it in our text. It necessarily implies an ingenuous confession of our sins, and of our desert on account of them. Think of the expression, "Abhor us not:" what a sense of extreme unworthiness does it convey! Yet is it not at all too strong: we are all, both by nature and practice, exceeding vile[u], and ought, like Job, to "abhor ourselves in dust and ashes[x]." Indeed *this* will be the state of every one that is truly penitent; he will look upon himself as "filthy and abominable[y]," and will "lothe himself for all his iniquities, and for all his abominations[z]." Every attempt to cloke or palliate our offences argues a want of humility, and operates to the exclusion of our souls from the Divine favour. We must be like convicted lepers in our own estimation, and justify our God in whatever sentence he may denounce against us[a].]

2. The

[m] ver. 7—9.
[n] Gal. iii. 16.
[o] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.
[p] Rom. iv. 16.
[q] Heb vi. 17, 18.
[r] Ps. lxxxix. 35.
[s] Lev. xxvi. 41, 42.
[t] Isai. lxiii. 15—19.
[u] Job xl. 4.
[x] Job xlii. 6.
[y] Ps. xiv. 3.
[z] Ezek. xxxvi. 31.
[a] Ps. li. 4.

2. The proper grounds of a sinner's encouragement—

[Though we may justly acknowledge the work of Divine grace in us, and may give glory to God for whatever change he may have wrought in our hearts, yet we must not regard any thing of our own as a *ground* for our confidence in God: we must look for all our grounds of encouragement in God alone, even in his infinite perfections, and in the covenant which he has made with us in the Son of his love. When David was overwhelmed with trouble, we are told, "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God." And this is what we are to do. In the prayer which the prophet offered, he drew all his pleas from the honour and fidelity of his God. And what encouragement can we want, if we only contemplate God as he is revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures? As a mighty Sovereign, his grace is his own, and he may grant it to whomsoever he will; yea, and his sovereignty will be the more displayed and glorified, in the communication of his grace to the very chief of sinners, and in making "his grace to abound, where sin has most abounded." The comfort to be derived from the contemplation of his love and mercy need not be stated; because that is obvious to the most inconsiderate mind. But even justice itself affords rich encouragement to a repenting sinner: for, has not an atonement been made for sin? and has not the Lord Jesus Christ discharged the debt of all those who trust in him? No doubt then; the justice of God, which has been satisfied by the ransom which his own Son has paid for us, will liberate us from our bondage, and restore us to all the privileges which his own Son has purchased for us. As he *can* be "a just God and yet a Saviour," so he *will* be just to his own Son, in shewing mercy to us for Christ's sake. Above all, his fidelity to his covenant-engagements leaves us no ground for fear; for never, since the foundation of the world, did one sinner perish who laid hold on his covenant, and rested in it as "all his salvation and all his desire."]

Let me in CONCLUSION be permitted to ask,

1. Have you ever pleaded with God in this manner—

[Alas! if God were now to order those who have pleaded thus with him to be sealed in their foreheads, and all the rest to be smitten dead upon the spot[b], what an awful spectacle would this place exhibit! Yet such a distinction will be made in the day of judgment. Beloved Brethren, consider this: and "judge yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord"———Shall it be said, that such pleadings are not necessary? What! were they judged necessary by the prophet for the averting of *temporal* judgments, and shall they not be for the averting of such as are *eternal*?

[b] Ezek. ix. 1—6.

eternal? Truly they are necessary for every Child of man; nor can we hope to obtain mercy with God, unless we seek him thus with our whole hearts.]

2. Have you ever pleaded thus with God in vain?

[Never did God turn a deaf ear to one who sought him in this manner: "never said he to any man, Seek ye my face in vain!" If any say that they have prayed, and yet not received an answer, we reply, that either they have never pleaded in this manner the perfections and the promises of God; or, an answer has been given, but has been overlooked. God cannot refuse an answer to a broken-hearted suppliant. He may answer in a way that we do not expect; or he may delay his answer with a view to our greater good: but as he has promised to grant such petitions as are offered up in faith, so will we affirm in the presence of the whole universe, that "every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened[c]."]

[c] Matt. vii. 7, 8.

DLIX.

THE WORD OF GOD PRECIOUS.

Jer. xv. 16. *Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.*

THE commission given to the Prophets was often of a very painful nature; to harden, rather than convert, their countrymen; and to denounce judgments, rather than to proclaim mercy[a]. Of this kind was the commission given to Jeremiah[b]: and for executing it, he was grievously persecuted and oppressed. Yet, notwithstanding the nature of his message, and the consequences resulting from a faithful delivery of it, he rejoiced in being honoured with an embassy from the King of kings; assured that, whatever might be the final result either to his countrymen or himself, God would be glorified. But when the Prophets were sent only to denounce judgments, they knew that there was a secret reserve in the mind of God for the exercise of mercy, in case the people who were thus menaced should repent. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh to declare explicitly that

[a] Isai. vi. 9—12. [b] ver. 1—4, 13, 14.

that in forty days the whole city should be overthrown, he had a secret suspicion, which in the event was verified, that God would, in case they repented, exercise mercy towards them. And in like manner, Jeremiah had a hope, that the faithful execution of his office, even though it should be unavailing to the generality, would be productive of good to some; and therefore on that account God's word, which he was sent to publish, "was unto him the joy and rejoicing of his heart." Under the Gospel dispensation, Ministers are sent, not so much to thunder out anathemas against the rebellious world, as to proclaim to them "glad tidings of great joy." And the scope of the Inspired Writings, as now collected into one volume, is to encourage the desponding, and to give rest to the heavy-laden. Well therefore may all, whether Ministers or people, when they take the Sacred Volume into their hands, say, "Thy word was found, and I did eat it; and it was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart."

In order to elucidate these words, we shall shew,

I. How the word of God should be received—

In the days of Josiah the word of God had been lost: and, when it was found, it was received with avidity, as a gift from heaven[c]. We do not however conceive that any similar event is referred to in the passage before us. The true light will be cast on our text, if we consult a parallel passage in the prophet Ezekiel, where it was said to him, "Son of man, eat that *thou findest*; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel:" and then he ate it, and it was in his "mouth as honey for sweetness[d]." In both the passages the word is compared to food, which is to be eaten and digested as the proper nutriment of the soul. This image is just; since, like common food, the word,

1. Is necessary for all—

[Who can live without it? Who can have any just knowledge of God without it, or have any conception how sinful man can

[c] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14—18. [d] Ezek. iii. 1—3.

can obtain mercy at the hands of his offended God? The greatest philosophers of Greece and Rome were entirely in the dark on all subjects connected with the soul; nor could unenlightened reason ever have explored those mysteries which the Inspired Volume alone has revealed to man. Even at this present day, notwithstanding the light of revelation, the great and learned amongst ourselves are still ignorant of Divine truth, if they have not been taught of God by the effectual application of his word to their souls. It is by the word that the knowledge of salvation is still communicated to every one of us: and we must all study it for ourselves, receiving its testimony with a believing heart, and submitting both our reason and our passions to its enlightening and sanctifying influence.]

2. It is suitable to all—

[In the Sacred Oracles there is "milk for babes, and strong meat" for those of an adult age[e]. The fundamental truths are written there so plainly, that "he who runs may read them:" and so clearly do they mark out the path to heaven, that "the way-faring man, though a fool, cannot err therein," if only he receive its directions with a humble and contrite spirit. On the other hand, there are in the Inspired Volume mysteries which no finite intelligence can fully comprehend. Not only may the greatest proficients in sacred literature be always advancing in knowledge, but the very angels themselves acquire more enlarged views of the manifold wisdom of God, from the revelation that is made of it in the Holy Scriptures[ee]. Moreover, so infinitely diversified is the instruction to be gathered from the Sacred Writings, that we can be in no situation in which it does not contain the directions and encouragements most suited to our case.]

3. It is sufficient for all—

["The Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus." We need no acquaintance with any other book, nor with any other subject which is not contained in that volume. Other books doubtless are useful, and a knowledge of many other subjects is desirable; but nothing is *necessary for salvation* which is not *contained in* the Holy Scriptures, and *easily to be learned from them*. A strange idea is maintained by some, that the Scriptures are unintelligible to the poor and illiterate; and that they are more likely to mislead them, than to guide them aright. But what a reflection is this on God himself, as having given us a book altogether unsuited to the end for which it was given! But there is no ground for any such reflection. There are doubtless in the Scriptures *some* things hard to be understood, and which *an unstable person* may wrest to his own destruction: but we again affirm, that all which is necessary to

[e] Compare Heb. vi. 13, 14. with 1 Pet. ii. 2. & Col. iii. 16.
[ee] 1 Pet. i. 12. with Eph. iii. 10.

to be known is easily to be gathered from the word of God; and that, if it be "received with meekness as an engrafted word, it is able," and shall be effectual, "to save the soul[f]."]

Let us now proceed to consider,

II. What effect it will produce—

As, when eaten by Ezekiel, it was as honey in his mouth, so to Jeremiah the word was the joy and rejoicing of his heart. In a man that is impenitent and unbelieving, we acknowledge that the word is calculated to inspire terror: but to one that is of a penitent and contrite spirit, it speaks nothing but peace and joy. This is the proper effect of every part of the Inspired Volume; of,

1. Its declarations—

[Oh, how wonderful are these! What an exhibition does the Scripture give us of God's character, and of the way which he has provided for the salvation of sinful men! What a stupendous mystery does it reveal, of the incarnation and death of his co-equal, co-eternal Son! of Christ "bearing our sins in his body on the tree," and "being made sin for us, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him!" Can such tidings as these reach the ears of a guilty and condemned sinner, and not fill him with joy? Can the voice of pardon reach the cell of a condemned criminal, and be received with indifference? or, if the offers of a free and full salvation were now to be sent to the regions of the damned, would they excite no joyous emotions among the unhappy sufferers? If there be any to whom the Gospel comes, that do not rejoice in the glad tidings, it is because they know not their lost estate, nor have any desire after reconciliation with their offended God. To those who know their guilty and undone state, the declarations of mercy sounding forth in the Gospel are "dearer than thousands of silver and gold."]

2. Its precepts—

[It may be thought, that, because these are so strict and holy, they can afford no joy to any: but the very reverse is the case; for the true Believer will say with David, "Thy word is very pure; *therefore* thy servant *lôveth* it[ff]." A redeemed soul is asking, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" and in the precepts he sees, what God requires of him, and how he may bring glory to the God of his salvation. He sees that an attention to these will perfect his nature, and transform him into the Divine image: hence "he esteems them concerning all things to be right[g];" and "*because they are*

[f] Jam. i. 21. [ff] Ps. cxix. 140. [g] ib. ver. 128.

are right, they rejoice his heart," and are accounted by him "sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb[h]."]

3. Its promises—

[These are justly called by the Apostle "exceeding great and precious," more especially because "by them we are made partakers of a divine nature[i]," and are enabled to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God[j]." Who can declare a thousandth part of the joy which a weary and heavy-laden sinner experiences in applying to his soul the promises of the Gospel? With what avidity does he devour them! they are like the first ripe fig which in the early spring a traveller sees, and devours, ere any one, however near to him, has time to claim it[k]: and the man who knows not this by his own sweet experience, has yet "to learn what be the very first principles of the oracles of God."]

4. Its threatenings—

[These to the Believer are scarcely less precious than the promises themselves. It was one great excellence of the Scriptures in the estimation of David, that "by them he was *warned*[l]." He regarded them as a mariner his chart, by which he is warned of the rocks and quicksands on which he will infallibly be wrecked, if he deviate from his proper course. Is there a seaman, who, when in imminent danger, is instructed by that faithful monitor to avoid destruction, will not adore his God for the warning that taught him to escape it? So it is with all who truly fear God: they love to be warned: they desire to be put upon their guard: they are afraid of turning aside in any respect, or of relaxing their efforts in the path of duty. Like Paul, they contemplate the danger of a relapse as an incentive to fresh exertions, and "keep their body under, and bring it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, they themselves should be cast-aways[m]." In a word, the Believer views the threatenings, as the angels which took Lot and his daughters by the hand, and, by representations of their danger, accelerated their escape from the devouring element: he acquiesces in them as "just and holy;" and by their quickening influence he finds them to be "good."]

May we not then LEARN from hence,

1. What enemies to their own souls they are who neglect the holy Scriptures—

[Notwithstanding the Scriptures are "the wells of salvation, from whence we are privileged to draw water with joy," the greater part even of the Christian world pay but little attention to them: any other book of science or amusement is preferred before

[h] Ps. xix. 8, 10. [i] 2 Pet. i. 4. [j] 2 Cor. vii. 1.
[k] Isai. xxviii. 4. [l] Ps. xix. 11. [m] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

before them, and, unless in a formal cursory way, they are never read at all. Now what folly is this! What man in his senses, when navigating his ship amongst rocks and quicksands, neglects to consult his chart? Yet, as if there were no dangers in the Christian's way, or no great evil to be incurred by negligence, the generality are quite indifferent about that book which alone can conduct us safely to a better world. But let it not be so amongst you: "Search the Scriptures, in which ye think, yea and know assuredly, ye have eternal life." "Search them daily," as the Beræans did: search them as for hid treasure: and lift up your hearts to God for the teachings of his good Spirit, "to guide you into all truth." "He will open your understandings to understand them," and will work effectually by them to your salvation. They are the rod of God's strength, and the sword of his Spirit: and if you read them in humility and faith, you shall find them "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and they shall discover to you the very thoughts and intents of your hearts[n]." If you will not sit thus at the feet of Jesus and learn of him, it is in vain for you to number yourselves among his disciples: but if you will come to him, you need not be discouraged at your weakness or ignorance; for he says, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."]

2. What an unspeakable blessing is *the Bible Society!*

[Though the Scriptures are not with us, as among the Papists, locked up in a language not generally understood, yet by the cost of a Bible it has been to a great extent kept out of the possession of the poor. True it is, that they who have known the value of the Bible would procure it at any rate; but those who were unacquainted with its treasures have found it too costly for them to purchase. But now he that is able to pay only a part may have it for that part; and they who can really pay nothing may have it for nothing. Now therefore the poor may well say, "Thy word *is found*; yes, it *is found*; and I will eat it." O that there were in all of us such a heart! and that we were all determined henceforth to feed upon its precious truths; and that, like Job, we "esteemed it more than our necesssary food[o]!" Now God is sending it to all of us, the poorest as well as the richest, exactly as he did the manna in the wilderness: he sends it home to our very houses, and invites us to live upon it. The king upon the throne has no richer food; and the poorest amongst us has now a free access to it, so that he may "eat that which is good, and let his soul delight itself in fatness[p]." Let us bless God then, who has put it into the hearts of so many to provide

[n] Heb. iv. 12. [o] Job xxiii. 12. [p] Isai. lv. 2.

provide for us such ample supplies of this invaluable treasure: and let us, all according to our ability, labour to promote the designs of a Society, which is the most honourable to God, and most useful to man, that ever existed upon the face of the earth.]

DLX.

NECESSITY OF KNOWING OURSELVES.

Jer. xvii. 9. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

A MORE important subject than that before us cannot occupy the human mind. The knowledge of ourselves is fundamental to all true knowledge of religion. Religion is no longer to us what it was to man in his primæval state, the natural expression of all the feelings of his soul: it is a remedy, devised for the restoration of his soul to the favour and to the image of his God: and we must see in what manner, and to what extent, we are fallen, before we can understand aright the provision made for our recovery: we must know our disorder before we can appreciate the remedy. Behold then what the Scripture speaks concerning us! The expressions in our text are not an Eastern metaphor, that must be softened down; or a complaint uttered against one particular individual, whose impieties far exceeded the common standard of mankind: they are a plain exposition of the state to which the heart of man is reduced by the fall of Adam: and, however we may wish, for the credit of human nature, to put a lenient construction on the terms, we cannot by any fair means explain them away: they are absolutely inflexible; and we must bow before them, as containing the infallible testimony of God concerning us. But it is not without a considerable measure of fear and diffidence that we enter upon the investigation of a subject so deep, so vast, so occult. When God himself says, "Who can know it?" we seem presumptuous in undertaking to explain it. But we hope that the acknowledged necessity of every man's attaining some knowledge of it will

will plead our excuse for any attempt which we may make to throw light upon it; and that you will supply our defects by lifting up your hearts to God in prayer, and intreating *him* to give you that self-knowledge, which, even a Heathen saw, must descend from heaven.

The subjects then for our present consideration are, The Deceitfulness, and Wickedness, of the human heart:

I. Its Deceitfulness—

There is perhaps no stronger proof of the deceitfulness of the heart than the power it possesses to hide its deceits from us. But, that we may present somewhat of its deceitfulness to your view, we will distinctly mark it in the three following particulars:

It misrepresents the *nature* of all things—

It keeps out of view their *tendency*—And

It deceives, not others only, but itself also.

Of course, when we say, 'It misrepresents the nature of all things,' we must be understood as speaking only of the things which concern the soul. To advert to other things, and to consider how far the powers of the human mind are enfeebled in relation to matters of mere science, would be altogether beside our purpose.

But where shall we begin our illustration of this point? If we look up to *God*, there is not a perfection of his nature which the unenlightened mind views aright; and as for those perfections which he exercises as the Moral Governor of the Universe, they are even held in abhorrence by the carnal mind: his absolute sovereignty is denied, as though the exercise of it were an injustice to man: his holiness and justice are supposed capable of winking at the commission of sin; and his veracity is impeached, to make way for the salvation of those who rebel against him. Some are so foolish and infatuated, as to "say, There is no God:" and, of those who acknowledge his existence, there is not one, unless he have been previously converted by Divine grace, who entertains worthy conceptions of him in his heart.

If we turn our thoughts to *the world around us;* What is there, that the heart of man views in its proper light? Its pleasures? its riches? its honours? All these, instead of being regarded as snares and worthless vanities, are perfectly idolized, and are sought after as constituting the chief happiness of man.

Look we to *morals?* How erroneous are our conceptions even of the plainest duties! Pride, anger, revenge, are held forth as noble and honourable; whilst the virtues of humility, meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, are despised, as indications of a weak and cowardly disposition. As formerly neither the Greeks nor Romans had a word in their language whereby to express the true notion of humility, so now the very idea of humility, as enjoined in the Christian code, never enters into the mind of an unconverted man, unless it be to load it with ridicule and contempt.

Go we further to *religion?* That is considered as consisting in little more than a profession of certain tenets, and an observance of certain forms. The entire devotion of the soul to God is deemed a foolish and culpable excess, the effect of needless timidity or of enthusiastic ardour: and, to countenance these ideas, harsh and offensive names are used to characterize all true piety; whilst every thing contrary to the Divine commands is palliated with soft names and plausible excuses.

In a word, the Scripture itself describes the heart of man in this precise view, as "calling evil good, and good evil; as putting darkness for light, and light for darkness; as putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter[a]."

Proceed we then, next, to observe, that the heart keeps out of view the *tendency* of things. Let us instance this in relation to sin. Who, on his first entrance on a sinful course, imagines whither his vicious propensities will lead him? He thinks of a present gratification, but does not consider that sin is

[a] Isai. v. 20.

is "like the letting out of water;" and that the smallest breach in a bank opens the way for the most extensive inundation. If a thought of our final account occur to the mind, the heart suggests, that the sin may be repented of with ease, and that there is no just reason to be afraid of its consequences; notwithstanding its uniform tendency is, to harden the heart, to sear the conscience, to grieve and quench the Holy Spirit of God, and to rivet upon our souls the chains which have been forged by the great destroyer of mankind. Ask any man who feels the burthen and the bitterness of sin, whether, when committing it, he had any idea of its tendency to distress the soul, and to create, as it were, a very hell within him? He will tell you, that, in following his lusts, he dreamed of nothing but pleasure; and that whilst he was tempted with the bait, the hook was only faintly suspected, or kept entirely out of view. Whatever be the sin to which we are tempted, the heart suggests, that there is no great evil in it; that God is too merciful to punish us eternally for such a trifle; that it is not possible for *us* to perish, since all around us are in the same state with ourselves; or that, at all events, a dying hour will be quite time enough for the indulging of any melancholy reflections; and that a few prayers, then offered, will answer every end that we can wish: thus the delusions of sin, and the wiles of Satan, are all countenanced by our own evil hearts; and the awful consequences of transgression are kept out of sight, till it is too late to avert them. Against this propensity of the heart we are warned in the holy Scriptures: If, says God, a man hearing the curses denounced against him in my word, "bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart, then I will not spare him; but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven[b]."

The

[b] Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

The third mark which we mentioned as shewing the unparalleled deceitfulness of the heart, is this, that it deceives, not others only, but itself also. It is said in our text to be "deceitful above all things." Riches and other things are said to be deceitful; but they are so called, only because the heart makes them occasions of deceiving us: they are themselves altogether passive in the matter. Of active agents, Satan is beyond all comparison the greatest deceiver, except the heart: but he, when he is deceiving, is conscious that he is deceiving: he does not for a moment imagine that he is speaking truth: but the heart persuades itself that it is not guilty of any imposition: it is as confident of its own integrity, as if it were really upright; and as fully convinced of the truth of its representations, as if they were really true. This is the case universally amongst those who are yet in a carnal and unconverted state. Those who imagine that religion consists in the observance of certain forms, are often as free from doubts as any people upon earth; and if it be insinuated that they are blind, they ask with surprise and indignation, "Are we blind also?" In like manner a ferocious blood-thirsty persecutor will actually "think, that, whilst he is killing the Lord's people, he is doing God service:" just as the persecuting Saul "verily thought with himself that he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus." But further, even the Atheist, who reduces God to a level with man, persuades himself that he is right; "Thou *thoughtest* that I was altogether such an one as thyself[c]." Indeed the same propensity of heart shews itself even after that we are converted: the Apostles themselves, when they would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village, thought undoubtedly, that their proposal was at least an acceptable expression of their zeal: but our Lord told them, that "they knew not what spirit they were of:" and Peter, when dissuading his Master from entertaining any thoughts about sufferings and death, supposed that he displayed most unexceptionably the tenderness of his love; whilst in reality he was, as

[c] Ps. l. 21.

as our Lord himself told him, no other than an agent of the Devil.

Of this power of the heart to deceive *itself*, all men are conscious, *in relation to others;* but all overlook it *in relation to themselves.* Nothing is easier than for a spectator to form a tolerably correct judgment of the motives and principles of others, and to see the obliquity of them, whilst the actors themselves imagine themselves actuated by the purest feelings. Justly therefore is it said by Him who cannot err, that "the heart is deceitful *above all things*," not excepting even Satan himself, the great deceiver of mankind.

We are now to consider,

II. The Wickedness of the heart—

But how shall we state it, so as in any measure to correspond with the description in our text? We are almost afraid that we shall be regarded as libelling human nature: yet we must declare the truth, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." Know then, that the heart by nature is *universally* wicked, *unsearchably* wicked, and *incurably* wicked.

It is *universally* wicked, both in all its powers, and in every exercise of each. We do not say, that there may not be a considerable portion of *comparative* good in men, so that they may be more amiable, and more worthy members of society than others; (for doubtless there is by nature a great difference in men, as well in their moral dispositions as in their intellectual powers;) but there is nothing *positively* good in them, in the strict acceptation of the word: for in the Book of Job it is said, "How can he be clean that is born of a woman? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean[d]?" And our Lord says, "There is none good but one; that is, God." The understanding of man is darkened, by sin; the will is rendered perverse and obstinate; the affections are sensualized: the conscience is made partial and insensible; and the whole man is altogether become abominable; his heart being the seat of every lust, the womb from whence every sin proceeds[e]. It must be remembered,

[d] Job. xiv. 4. & xxv. 4. [e] Mark vii. 21—23.

bered, moreover, that man sins by defect, as well as by a direct and wilful opposition to his duty; so that even if we should imagine human nature to be possessed of all the excellencies which its most sanguine advocates can imagine, still we must all adopt for ourselves the confession of St. Paul, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." We are aware that this may appear to go beyond the truth: but, if any be disposed to entertain such an opinion, we would ask, What is the meaning of that declaration, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually[f]?" This testimony, though spoken of men before the Flood, was renewed in reference to men after the Flood: and what can be conceived more decisive of the point than this? Not only the *thoughts* of men, but the *imaginations* of their thoughts, yea, and *every* imagination of their thoughts, was *evil*, and *only* evil, and only evil *continually*. This was the testimony of Him "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins:" we may be well assured, therefore, that this record is true.

Again—The heart is also *unsearchably* wicked. Not only are we unable to discover all the evil that is in the hearts of others; we cannot even in our own. Suppose a man to have discovered ever so much of his own depravity, there will yet be depths within him unfathomable and unexplored. As Ezekiel, in the chambers of imagery, saw on every successive search more and greater abominations than before, so will a man to his dying hour find in his heart many and great evils which he had not so clearly seen before. Times and occasions will call them forth; so that a man will often wonder how such evils could remain within him, or, if within him, how they should have continued so long undiscovered. The truth is, a man could not bear a full sight of his own heart at once; it would drive him to utter despair: nor is any man capable of seeing it all at once: its deceits are so subtle, its corruptions so various, and its abominations so

[f] Gen. vi. 5. & viii. 21.

so inconceivably great, that none but an infinite capacity can grasp such immeasurable heights and depths. Well therefore has God said, "Who, except the heart-searching God, can know it?"

But once more;—It is *incurably* evil. Whether or not, as some have thought, this is the precise import of the word, it is plain that the idea is strongly conveyed in our Translation, as it stands. Verily our case, as to any human remedies at least, is desperate. We call not any case desperate in relation to the Gospel; because there is no sin from which the blood of Christ cannot cleanse us, nor any corruption, which the Spirit of Christ is not able to subdue. But to human means the wickedness of our hearts bids defiance: they can no more overcome it, than Elisha's staff in Gehazi's hand could raise the Shunamite's child to life. No resolutions of ours, no exertions, can banish it from the soul. We may on many occasions restrain its actings; for even the presence of a fellow-creature will often impose a more effectual restraint than the presence of our God: but we cannot subdue it, we cannot mortify it, we cannot purge it away: it is like the leprosy in the house, that could not be in any way removed, but by pulling down the house altogether. This, it must be confessed, is a melancholy picture: but it is the very truth of God, and is known, and felt, to be so, by all who are taught of God.

Now from this view of our subject we may clearly see,

1. *The true ground of the doctrine of the New Birth*—

It is surprising how often the Scripture speaks respecting the being "born again," the being "begotten of God," and "born of God:" which terms must of necessity import, not merely an outward change of state or profession in baptism, but an inward change of heart, a passing "from darkness to light," "from death to life." It is to be "born, not of water only, but of the Spirit also." When that takes place, we die to sin, and begin to live unto righteousness: we become "new creatures in Christ Jesus: old things pass away; and all things become new[s]." Baptism is the sign and seal

[s] 2 Cor. v. 17.

seal of it, but not the thing itself. What the circumcision of the *heart* was, as compared with the circumcision of the *flesh*, that the new birth is, as compared with baptism: it is the real radical change, of which the external rite was a type or shadow[h]. Now this change is absolutely and indispensably necessary to the salvation of the soul: "Verily, verily I say unto you," says our Lord, "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But why so? why must every Child of man undergo such a change as this? For this plain reason; He is so radically corrupt in every faculty and power of his soul by nature, as to be absolutely incapable of enjoying heaven, even if he were there: having no love to a holy God, nor any delight in holy employments *here*, he would be destitute of them *there*; being filthy *here*, he would be "filthy *still*." This, we apprehend, is the exact meaning of those words of our Lord, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." Nicodemus not understanding the nature, or the reasons, of the doctrine which our Lord had insisted on, our Lord told him, that the new birth was founded on our unfitness by nature for the kingdom of heaven; since that which was born of the flesh, being only fleshly, was altogether incapable of spiritual enjoyments; whereas that which was born of the Spirit being spiritual, it was necessary to fit us for the exercises and employments of a spiritual kingdom. Let us not then deceive ourselves with vain disputations about *words*, but let us attend to *things* which admit of no doubt. Our hearts are by nature "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and they must be changed by the operation of the Spirit of God: we must have "the heart of stone taken away, and a heart of flesh given to us:" we must be "renewed after the image of our God

[h] The benefits arising from baptism are great, even as those were which arose from circumcision. See Rom. ix. 4, 5. But we must not confound a change of *state* with a change of *nature*. The neglecting to make this distinction is the foundation of all the errors which have arisen on this subject. See Rom. ii. 28, 29.

God in righteousness and true holiness;" and therefore we should not rest one hour in a carnal and unconverted state; but should cry mightily to our God for his effectual grace, saying with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" The Lord grant that this prayer may ascend up before him from every one of us, till we have obtained an answer to it in the renovation of our souls!

In the next place, We may see from hence, *Our utter need of an interest in Christ*—

With such hearts as ours, how can we ever dream of *meriting* any thing at the hands of God? To shew the vanity of any such idea, let us not rest in a general notion of man's goodness, but descend to particulars, and try to find some one action that can stand the test of God's word, some one in which God himself shall not be able to find a flaw. Let a man search through the whole records of his life for one such action; and if he find *one*, we will be contented that he shall stand upon that as the foundation of his hopes, and claim heaven on the ground of his own merits. But if not one such action can be found by the best person upon earth, how much less can a whole series of such actions, from the beginning to the end of life, be found! yet nothing less than that could warrant a claim to heaven on the ground of our own obedience: one single transgression, however small, is a violation of the law; and not only makes void all its promises of life, but renders us obnoxious to its curses, even to everlasting misery and death[1]. Let us then discard so vain, so fatal a delusion: let us be contented to stand on the same foundation as St. Paul: let us "desire to win Christ, and to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ." We *call* the Lord Jesus Christ, "Saviour:" let us rely upon him as our Saviour: let us trust in his blood and righteousness as the only meritorious ground of our hope: and let us glory in him, as "all our salvation, and all our desire."

Lastly,

[1] Gal. iii. 10.

Lastly, Let us see from hence, *The importance of self-diffidence and self-distrust*—

There is an astonishing degree of confidence in men of every class and every description. The ungodly man, who gratifies all his inclinations, and lives altogether without God in the world, has no fear that he shall perish: 'his sins are no other than venial frailties, and God neither notices nor regards them.' The man who is a mere formalist, whose religion consists in a "form of godliness without the power of it," is equally persuaded, that no harm shall ever happen to him: he performs his duty, and has no doubt of his final acceptance with God. The man whose heart is divided between God and the world, and who will follow religion only so far as agrees with his interests and humour, is quite certain that God is pleased with him, and will accept at his hand his reluctant and mutilated offerings. The zealous talkative religionist, who disgraces his profession by his conceit, his censoriousness, his neglect of his own proper duties and calling, by his disorderly conduct both in Church and State, yea, by all manner of evil tempers and sinful practices, even he also has no doubt but that his name is written in heaven. And, if we attempt to expostulate with any of these on their unscriptural presumption, they are quite offended at the liberty we take, and are surprised that we dare to question the certainty of their salvation[k]. Thus does Satan blind them all, and "lead them captive at his will." But let me intreat all to relax somewhat of their confidence, and to bring their expectations to the test of Scripture. It is certain that many do believe a lie; and are given over to it by God, as the punishment of their presumption. What the Apostle says respecting this, is so awful, that I almost tremble to repeat his words: yet as they are the words of God himself, I trust you will hear them, not

[k] To this effect is that humiliating observation of Solomon, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits." And again, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Prov. xvi. 2, 25.

not only without offence, but with the reverence that is due to God: "For this cause," (that is, "because men receive not the love of the truth, that they may be saved,") "God shall send them strong delusion, that they may believe a lie, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness[l]." What a fearful judgment is this! and how should we dread the provoking of God to inflict it upon us! If then we would not be given up to judicial blindness, "let us search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord our God." Let us be satisfied with nothing but the clear express testimony of Scripture: for God has said, "He that trusteth his own heart, is a fool[m]." If we find that we have really been born again of the Spirit, and been washed from our sins in the Redeemer's blood; if there be no sin which we knowingly indulge, nor any command of God which we do not endeavour to fulfil; if we can call God to witness, that the continued labour of our lives is to "walk as Christ walked;" then God forbid that I should attempt to destroy the confidence of such persons: they have a right to be confident; and instead of distressing their minds with needless fears, I would exhort them to "hold fast their confidence, and the rejoicing of their hope firm unto the end." But nevertheless I would intreat them to deal faithfully with their own souls; and not only to search them with all diligence themselves, but to cry mightily unto God in the words of David; "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting!" Yea more, to their dying hour I would urge them to be diffident of themselves, even when they are most confident in God. For even St. Paul felt this to be necessary: "Though I know nothing by myself," says he, "yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord." There may be self-deceit in us, even when we are least aware of it: and therefore with all our might we should guard against it, lest we find out our delusions, when it is too

[l] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. [m] Prov. xxviii. 26.

too late to apply a remedy. Of one thing we are sure, that God will not fix our state according to our fancied attainments, but according to our real character in his sight. We say therefore to all, and with those words we shall close our discourse, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

DLXI.

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

Jer. xxiii. 24. *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.*

MEN universally encourage themselves in sin, from the hopes of impunity. But they are under a fatal delusion: for however secret their iniquities may be, there is one who beholds them, with all their aggravating circumstances, and will bring them forth to the light, as grounds of his righteous indignation. The false prophets of old imagined that their pretensions to inspiration would subject them to no danger, provided they could preserve appearances before men; but God expostulates with them in the words before us, and appeals to their own consciences for a testimony against them. He appeals to them respecting the omnipresence of the Deity; to which important subject we would now call your attention,

I. In a way of rational inquiry—

The Heathen believed their gods to be confined to particular temples, or to certain districts[a]: but can we imagine that JEHOVAH is thus limited?

Consult reason—

[Is God the Creator of the world? How then can he be absent from any part of it, seeing that he must have been present with the

[a] 1 Kin. xx. 23.

the whole at the time he formed it? Is he the Governor of the world? how then can he be limited to any place, since he must be every where, to direct and manage those events, which, without his superintending providence, would throw the universe into confusion. Is he God? if he be, he must be perfect; but if he be circumscribed by space, he must he imperfect; he must be ignorant of those things which he cannot behold, and impotent in respect of those things which he cannot reach.]

Consult Scripture—

[The Sacred Records testify that he is in heaven; for "he dwelleth in the high and holy place[b]." Yet they do not limit him to heaven; for "the heaven of heavens cannot contain him[c]." He is spoken of as existing upon earth; for "in him we live, and move, and have our being[d]." Yet it is not in any particular part of the earth that he exists; for "he filleth all in all[e]."]

Consult conscience—

[Every man who has ever heard of God has within him a consciousness that the Divine Being is present with him, and is privy to his most secret thoughts. In the midst of their wickedness indeed men try to persuade themselves that God does not see them[f]: but in seasons of reflection they cannot divest themselves of the conviction, that his all-seeing eye penetrates the inmost recesses of their hearts. What David confessed with joy, they feel with terror and dismay; that, whether they be in heaven, earth, or hell, they cannot for one moment escape the notice of their God[g].

God is said indeed to have dwelt in the Temple, and in the bush; and to be "far from the wicked:" but all such expressions relate, not to his essence, but to the manifestations of his presence. In every possible view, *the appeal* made to us in the text defies an answer, and precludes a doubt.]

Not to rest in mere theories, let the same subject be considered,

II. In a way of practical improvement—

Numberless are the truths which this subject would suggest to our minds; but we must of necessity confine ourselves to a few of the most important:

1. What folly is it to commit sin under the idea of secrecy!

[That such folly obtains in the world, is manifest to all. The thief

[b] Isai. lvii. 15. [c] 1 Kin. viii. 27. [d] Acts xvii. 28.
[e] Eph. i. 23. [f] Gen. iii. 8. Job xxii. 13, 14. Ps. xciv. 7.
[g] Ps. cxxxix. 1—12.

thief takes advantage of his privacy to lay his hand upon his neighbour's property. The adulterer watches for the return of night, when he may accomplish his wicked purposes without detection[h]. Sinners of every description commit in secret what they would not dare to perpetrate, if they knew that the eyes of their fellow-creatures were upon them. But whence is this, unless from the atheistical conceit that God is not privy to their actions, or from an utter forgetfulness of his presence? Such conduct however is folly in the extreme: for "God's eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good[i]." "The darkness is no darkness to him: the night and the day to him are both alike:" and, as he observes, so will he also "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart[k]," as a ground of that sentence which he will one day pass upon all the workers of iniquity.

Let this be remembered in reference to all the sins we have ever committed in secret; and let it teach us to seek the remission of them while yet the day of mercy is continued to us.]

2. How vain are the hopes of the hypocrite!

[It is no very difficult matter to impose upon men: yea, we may also deceive our ownselves; but we cannot deceive God. However specious our conduct may be, he will discern our corrupt motives and principles, and will judge us according to the real quality of our actions. There is one way, and only one, in which we can hide our sins from God; and that is, by fleeing to the Lord Jesus Christ for refuge: then, though God will behold the sinner, he shall not be able to behold the sin; for it shall all be "blotted out as a morning cloud," and be "cast behind him into the depths of the sea:" the vilest sinner in the universe, if he "be found in Christ," shall be "complete[l]" "without spot or blemish[m]." Such a hiding-place is Christ[n]; and such shall be the felicity of all that believe in him[o]. But it is in vain to hope that by any other means we shall escape the wrath of God: for "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do;" and every sin not purged away by the blood of Jesus shall be visited with just and everlasting judgments.]

3. How secure are they who put their trust in God!

[Many of the enemies with whom the Christian has to contend, are hidden from his view: but neither they nor any of their devices are concealed from the eyes of God. He is everywhere present to protect his people, and to defeat the plots of their adversaries. He it is that has given to our enemies the strength and

[h] Job xxiv. 15—17. [i] Prov. xv. 3. [k] 1 Cor. iv. 5.
[l] Col. ii. 10. [m] Eph. v. 27. [n] Isai. xxxii. 2.
[o] Acts x. 43.

and wisdom which they exert against us; and he engages that "none of the weapons which they form against us shall prosper[p]." "Let the weak then say, I am strong:" for "if God be for them, who shall be against them?" Only let them "acknowledge him in all their ways," and depend upon him in all their trials, and they need not fear[q]; for "his eyes shall run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in their behalf[r]."]

[p] Isai. liv. 16, 17. [q] Ps. xlvi. 1, 2. [r] 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

DLXII.

RELIGION IS NOT A SOURCE OF EVIL TO THOSE WHO EMBRACE IT.

Jer. xxv. 5, 6. *Turn ye now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings . . . . . and I will do you no hurt.*

SIN is the greatest of all evils; because it is the source from which all evils flow. Nor can the miseries which it has introduced be ever remedied, but by a thorough turning unto God. This, Jeremiah tells us, was the remedy prescribed by *all the Prophets*[a]: and certainly it is the only one that can ever prove effectual.

The passage, from whence the text is taken, contains, in addition to the words which we have cited, a dehortation or dissuasion from idolatry; together with an intimation, that a continuance in that sin would accelerate their ruin, and insure their exclusion from the Promised Land: they would persist in it "*to their hurt*[b]. On the contrary, if they would return to God, he would forbear to inflict upon them his threatened judgments, and "*do them no hurt.*"

But we omit that which related to the temporal state of the Jews, in order that we may fix your attention more immediately upon that part of the subject which is applicable to all persons in all ages of the world.

The text consists of,

I. An exhortation—

As idolatry was at that time the national sin of the Jews,

[a] ver. 4. with the text. [b] ver. 7.

Jews, so every one has some evil way to which he is more particularly addicted. We cannot pretend to trace all the shades of difference that are found in different men: we will rather arrange the whole under three great and comprehensive classes; to one or other of which, all, except true Christians, belong. We therefore say, Turn,

1. From profaneness—

[That this is a common sin amongst us; needs no proof: we cannot open our eyes or our ears, but we must be speedily convinced of it———

Let then as many of you as have entertained licentious principles, or indulged in vicious practices, "turn from the evil of your doings," yea, turn from it speedily, and with utter abhorrence.]

2. From worldliness—

[While the young and gay are rushing into vice, and pouring contempt upon every thing that is serious, a great part of mankind are immersed in worldly cares, and as regardless of religion as their more dissipated brethren———

True it is, that these persons have more specious grounds on which to vindicate their conduct, inasmuch as it seems nearly allied to prudence and diligence. Still, however, while we highly approve of those virtues, we cannot but condemn a wordly spirit as evil; since it is declared to be incompatible with the love of God[c]: and therefore we say to all, "Turn from it," lest you deceive yourselves to your utter ruin.]

3. From formality—

[There is a very considerable number of persons, whose strictness of principle, and correctness of manners, screen them effectually against any charge of profaneness; while their indifference to riches and aggrandizement shews that they are not open, in any great degree, to the imputation of worldliness. But their religion consists in a mere round of duties, in which they have no real enjoyment of God, but only a self-righteous, self-complacent approbation of their own minds———

That this also is evil, we cannot doubt, if only we bear in mind that God requires our *hearts*[d]; and that every service, in which the heart is not engaged, is declared to be vain and worthless in his sight[e].

In exhorting such persons to turn from the evil of their doings, we would by no means be understood to discourage diligence in attending on divine ordinances, whether public or private; but only

[c] 1 John ii. 15—17. [d] Prov. xxiii. 26.
[e] Matt. xv. 8, 9. Compare 2 Tim. iii. 5.

only to guard against a resting in the performance of duties, and a substituting of that in the place of Christ. In appreciating our religious observances, let us judge of them by their spirituality, and by our enjoyment of God in them: and, if they be ever so devout, still let us remember that they make no atonement for sin, nor do they confer any obligation whatever upon God: yea, rather, the more devout they are, the more we are indebted to God for that grace whereby we are enabled so to worship him.]

To confirm the exhortation, God has been pleased to add,

II. A promise—

At first sight the promise appears to be unworthy of God, and incapable of affording any great encouragement to those to whom it is made. But, if taken altogether abstractedly, it surely is no light matter for those who deserve all the judgments that God can inflict, to be assured, that he will never do them any hurt: and, if considered in connexion with our fears and apprehensions, it will be found to contain the richest consolation. *In this view,* we observe, God will do us no hurt in respect of,

1. Our intellect—

[When we begin in earnest to be religious, our friends are ready to suppose that we are, or shall soon be, beside ourselves[f]: nor can we altogether wonder at their judgment, when we consider how great the change is, (like a river turning back to its source,) and how unable they are to account for it. But they may spare themselves their fears; for God gives his people, not a spirit of delusion, but "of a *sound mind*[g]." The prodigal's return to his father's house was the first proof of sanity, not of insanity: nor has any person a spark of true wisdom in him, till he begin to fear the Lord[h]. In conversion, a man is made to form a correct judgment respecting his most important concerns; and not only to view things in the same light that God views them, but to act agreeably to those views. As well therefore might the man whose eyes Jesus had opened be said to have suffered injury in his organs of vision, as a person thus enlightened in his judgment be said to have suffered in his intellect[i].]

2. Our

[f] See Mark iii. 21. Acts xxvi. 24. 2 Cor. v. 13.
[g] 2 Tim. i. 7. [h] Ps. cxi. 10.
[i] That people who are insane, may fix their thoughts upon religion, or that a person may become distracted by *misapprehensions* of religion,

2. Our friends—

[We are taught to expect, that, on our becoming decided followers of Christ, "our greatest foes will be those of our own household[k]:" and experience accords with the declarations of Scripture on this head. But are we therefore injured in this respect? Our Lord has told us, and experience accords with that also, that if we lose any friends for his sake, he will repay us in kind, as it were, an hundred-fold[l]. A merchant who should part with his goods to such advantage as this, would surely not be thought to have sustained any loss. But besides this recompence in the present world, God himself will be our friend, both now and for ever. And would not *this* amply repay the loss of all earthly friends?]

3. Our reputation—

[Though the whole of our conduct be visibly improved, yet shall we, on turning to God, be loaded with opprobrium and contempt; and though something may be gained by prudence, or conceded to us on account of our celebrity in learning, there is no religious person that occupies the same place in the estimation of the world that he would do if he were not religious. If our Lord himself was "despised and rejected of men[m]," and the Apostles were deemed "the off-scouring of all things[n]," it is in vain for us to expect honour from man[o]. But are we therefore without honour? No: our very disgrace, when so procured, is a very high honour, inasmuch as it assimilates us to Christ[p], and is a testimony to us of our fidelity[q]. But suppose that ignominy had nothing to counterbalance it here, should we have any reason to regret it when Christ "confessed us before his Father, and his holy angels;" and when they who despised us, shall "awake to shame and everlasting contempt[r]?"]

4. Our interests—

[The laws of the land certainly afford us very great protection. Nevertheless it is no uncommon thing at this day for children and servants to be called to make very great sacrifices for the Gospel sake. But be it so: they are forced, like St. Paul, to serve the Lord "in cold and nakedness," and in a privation of all earthly comforts. But are they eventually "hurt?" What if their spiritual consolations be proportioned to their temporal afflictions: have they not made a good exchange? Is not peace in the bosom incomparably better than money in the purse? The riches of this world are easily appreciated: but those which Christ

religion, is confessed: but if religion would drive a man mad, the more religious he was, the more likely to be mad. Who does not shudder at the consequences that would result from that opinion?

[k] Matt. x. 35, 36. [l] Mark x. 29, 30. [m] Isai. liii. 3.
[n] 1 Cor. iv. 13. [o] Matt. x. 24, 25. with John v. 44.
[p] 1 Pet. iv. 13. [q] Luke xxi. 13. [r] Dan. xii. 2.

Christ imparts, are "unsearchable." Their despisers would, at a future day, give all the world for a drop of water only to cool their tongue. How rich then must they be who are drinking living waters eternally at the fountain head!]

5. Our happiness—

[Doubtless the godly have grounds of mourning peculiar to themselves: but are they therefore losers in respect of happiness? No: their sorrows, if I may so speak, are sources of joy: they would on no account be without them: they rather regret that they cannot sorrow more: they mourn because they cannot mourn, and weep because they cannot weep: and if at any time they have been enabled to abase themselves before God in dust and ashes, they look back upon such seasons as the most precious in their whole lives. But if they have sorrows unknown to others, have they not "joys also, with which the stranger intermeddleth not?" Let a promise be applied with power to their souls, or "the love of God be shed abroad in their hearts," have they not a very foretaste of heaven upon earth? Compare their state with that of others, on a dying bed: follow them in the instant of their departure from the body: see them welcomed to the bosom of their Lord: contemplate their eternal state, in contrast with that of their despisers; and then say whether they have any reason to complain, that their fidelity to God occasioned on the whole a diminution of their happiness?]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are yet following their evil ways—

[We inquire not, What are the ways you follow: if you do not turn from *every* evil way to God, and devote yourself unreservedly to your Lord and Saviour, the issue will be the same, whatever course you take. Your guilt may be more or less aggravated, and your misery be apportioned accordingly: but, without entering into the different degrees of punishment, let me ask, Will not *sin* "do you *hurt?*"———And would not God do you *good*, if you would return unto him?———"Turn then from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[s]."]

2. Those who are turning from their evil ways—

[Halt not between two opinions: strive not to reconcile the inconsistent services of God and Mammon[t]. "If Baal be God, follow him: but if the Lord be God, then follow him." There is a certain kind of turning unto God, by which you will suffer hurt on every side, and receive no benefit whatever. If your "heart be not whole with God," no good can accrue to you, nor can any evil be averted from you. The world will not approve of you, because you are too precise for them: and God will not approve of

[s] Ezek. xviii. 30. [t] Matt. vi. 24.

of you, because you are not upright before him. Be not then temporizing and hypocritical, but open, decided, and consistent characters. "Follow your Lord fully:" "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach [u]." Thus, though "your life may be accounted madness, and your end to be without honour, yet shall you be numbered among the children of God, and have your lot among his saints [x]."]

[u] Heb. xiii. 13. [x] Wisd. v. 4, 5.

DLXIII.

GOD'S GRACIOUS DESIGNS TOWARDS HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.

Jer. xxx. 10, 11. *Fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.*

THE peculiar importance of these words may be judged of from hence, that the prophet, without any apparent necessity, or indeed any visible connexion, introduces them again, towards the close of his prophecies [a]. But the subject of them is so consolatory, and the view which they open to us of God's future dispensations is so glorious, that they may well be proposed to our most attentive consideration. Respecting their primary import we can have no doubt. They look forward to a period far beyond the return of the Jews from Babylon, even to that blessed period, when the whole shall be converted to the faith of Christ, and be restored to the possession of the land of Canaan [b]. That such a period shall arrive, we have the strongest and most unequivocal declarations of Holy Writ [c]: and it becomes us all to look forward to it with confidence and joy.

But we must not so contemplate the future good of others, as to overlook our own personal and immediate

[a] Ch. xlvi. 27, 28. [b] ver. 8, 9. [c] Compare Hos. iii. 5.

mediate welfare. The words before us convey most comfortable tidings to ourselves; which therefore we shall advert to in connexion with the event to which they more especially refer: and in order to this we shall deduce from them some general observations. Observe then,

I. That God has glorious things in reserve for his chosen people—

1. For the Jewish people—

[There is certainly mercy in reserve for them: "their yoke has never been so broken from their neck, but that strangers have served themselves of them[d]," and do still oppress them. A season of happiness awaits them, such as they never experienced in their most prosperous days: "they shall be at rest, and be quiet, and none shall make them afraid:" and this outward peace shall be only a shadow of that inward joy which they shall experience under the protection of their reconciled God and Saviour, who will be "a little sanctuary unto them[e]."]

2. For his people among all nations—

[However "far off" his people are, God sees, and knows them[f], and will in due season bring them to himself[g]. No enemy shall be able to detain them: their bonds shall be broken, and they shall be "brought into the glorious liberty of the Children of God." O what sweet peace and composure of mind shall they enjoy, when they are truly brought to the fold of Christ[h]! What blessed assurance too shall they possess, not only of their present interest in the Saviour, but of final victory, and everlasting felicity[i]!

Yet is this but the beginning of blessings: the time shall come when the saints of all ages, even from the beginning to the end of time, shall be gathered together, every one of them freed from all remains of sin and sorrow, and raised to the fruition of their heavenly inheritance.

Shall we not then, whilst we contemplate the future destinies of God's ancient people, consider also our own; when, even *in this life*, such "things are prepared for us as no unrenewed eye hath seen, or ear heard, or heart conceived[k];" and, *in the world to come*, such things as exceed the comprehension whether of men or angels?]

Subservient to this great design, God orders every thing for them in love, so,

II. That

[d] ver. 8. [e] Ezek. xi. 16, 17. with Jer. xxiii. 6.
[f] 2 Tim. ii. 19. [g] John x. 16. [h] Ps. xxiii. 1, 2.
[i] ib. ver. 4—6. [k] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

II. That even his darkest dispensations towards them are intended for their good—

This was, and still is, the case with respect to the Jews—

[The sending of that whole nation into captivity in Babylon was doubtless a heavy judgment: but yet we are expressly told that God designed it "for their good[l]." And we doubt not but that the destruction of their whole state and polity by the Romans, together with their present dispersion over the face of the whole earth, is intended for their good also. By the Babylonish captivity they were cured of idolatry; and by the total abolition of the Temple worship, all hope of obtaining mercy by the ceremonial rites and ceremonies is cut off, and they are "shut up unto the faith that is now revealed." We trust also that they are preparing to be God's honoured instruments of evangelizing the world; seeing that the receiving of them into the Church will be as life from the dead to the Gentile world[m]. We see clearly that there is an immense difference put between them, and all the nations which once led them captive. The Egyptians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Romans, have ceased to exist as distinct kingdoms; and have been lost, as it were, among the people who subdued them: but the Jews are in every place a distinct people, and are so kept by God's overruling providence, that he may accomplish more manifestly his gracious purposes towards them. Many indeed, like Pharaoh, have sought their destruction; but they live as monuments of God's unceasing care and faithfulness.]

And may not we also see the hand of God ordering and overruling every thing for our good?

[His chastening hand may have been upon us; but the consolations and supports with which he has favoured us have almost changed the very nature of our afflictions. Besides, he has, like a skilful Refiner, apportioned our trials to our necessities; and always either increased our strength to sustain them, or provided for us a way to escape from them. Let any one of us look back, even the most afflicted amongst us, and say, Whether God has not corrected always "*in measure*[n]?" yea, whether his corrections have not "wrought for our good;" and whether, if our hearts be indeed right with God, they have not been "working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory[o]?" Yes, "By these have our iniquity been purged; and the fruit of them has been to take away our sin[p]:" and in all that he may have inflicted on us, he has acted the part, not of an angry Judge, but of a loving Father[q].]

Well

[l] Jer. xxiv. 5. [m] Rom. xi. 15. [n] Isai. xxvii. 7, 8.
[o] Rom. viii. 28. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. [p] Isai. xxvii. 9.
[q] Heb. xii. 6—8.

Well may God's people rejoice in such hopes as these, seeing,

III. That his presence with them is their never-failing security—

God did not so withdraw from the Jews in Babylon, but that he was with them to watch over them, and to overrule events for their deliverance at the time appointed. Thus at this day he hears the cries of his afflicted people, and only waits till the appointed time to shew himself strong in their behalf. Thus is his presence with us our security also.

[He has promised "never to leave us or forsake us[r]." In our troubles more especially has he engaged to be with us[s]. Nor will he ever leave us, till he has accomplished all the good pleasure of his goodness towards us[t]. Had it not been for his presence with his Church and people, their enemies would long since have triumphed over them: but because "he is with them to save them," they shall be "more than conquerors" over all their enemies, and "be saved by him with an everlasting salvation."]

APPLICATION—

Thrice, in the parallel passage, does God repeat the exhortation, "Fear not[u]." We therefore will address that exhortation,

1. To those who are afar off—

[Look at the Jews in Babylon, or in their present state; What can be conceived more hopeless? ——— Yet they *were*, and *shall be* delivered. Let none then despair, as if they were beyond the reach of mercy: for "God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save;" and they shall "be brought nigh by the blood of Jesus," which is able to "cleanse from all sin."]

2. To those who are visited with any great affliction—

[You are apt to conclude, that, because you are afflicted, you are monuments of God's wrath. But God makes these very afflictions a subject of promise: "I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished." He knows that without these afflictions you would never return to him, or never be purified from your dross: it is because you are a child, and not a bastard, that he thus visits you with his chastising rod. It was in this view of his dispensations that David said, "In very faithfulness

[r] Heb. xiii. 5. [s] Isai. xliii. 2, 3. [t] Gen. xxviii. 15.
[u] See Note [u].

faithfulness thou hast afflicted me." Faithfulness has respect to a promise: and it is your privilege to see every one of your afflictions as the fruit of his faithfulness and love.]

3. To those who are under discouragement of any kind—

["Fear not, fear not, fear not." It is God's delight to "bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort all that mourn;" and thrice does he renew to you the exhortation, "Fear not." Only seek to have his presence with you, and you need fear nothing. Remember the Disciples in the storm: Could they sink whilst Jesus was in the vessel with them[x]? Neither can ye, under your circumstances. If God be for you, none can be effectually against you. Take him with you then, wherever you go; and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against you[y]."]

[x] Mark iv. 37—40. [y] Isai. xli. 10, 14.

DLXIV.

GOD'S REGARD FOR THOSE WHO APPROACH UNTO HIM.

Jer. xxx. 21. *Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.*

THE history of the Jews is deserving of attention, not merely as unfolding to our view the gradual introduction of Christianity, but as shadowing forth all the most important parts of the Christian system. The passage before us primarily relates to the return of the Jews from Babylon. It foretells, that a terrible destruction should come upon their oppressors: that they, in consequence of it, should be restored to their own country, and live under Governors of their own nation, and have the same access to God, in his worship, as they had enjoyed before the destruction of their city and temple. But, under these events, many others of a more sublime nature were typified. Their Governors represented Christ, who should in due time arise to reign over them; and their enjoyment of divine ordinances depicted the privileges which we were to possess under the Christian dispensation. To evince this, we will shew,

I. To whom this passage refers—

Besides

Besides referring to Zerubbabel and the Jewish people, it refers,

1. To Christ—

[Beyond all doubt he was the Governor who was to arise from among that people[a], and to reign over the house of David for ever[b]——— He "approached unto God" as our Surety and High Priest on earth, and as our Advocate and Intercessor in heaven——— In this glorious work he "engaged his heart." When first he entered into covenant with the Father respecting it, he shewed that his whole heart was engaged in it[c]: and, from the moment that he entered upon his work, he persisted in it, notwithstanding all which he had to endure in the prosecution of it[d]———]

2. To his people—

[His followers are characterized as "a people near unto God[e]:" and to them, as the words following the text evince, the words before us may be applied. They endeavour to "approach God" in the way that he has appointed: they "draw near to him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." They approach him in the public ordinances and in their private chambers. They "have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus:" they come even to the throne of God: they "stir up themselves to lay hold on him," and "will not let him go, until he bless them." In this work they "engage their hearts:" they know that "the drawing nigh to God with their lips only is a vain service:" they therefore labour to "worship him in Spirit," and to say with David, "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed." Whatever discouragements arise, they know that to yield to them must be productive of the most fatal consequences: and therefore they determine, if they are tempted at any time to say "I am cast out of the sight of thine eyes," they will not despair; but will "cry unto God from the very belly of hell[f]," assured that "none shall ever seek his face in vain."]

But

[a] Compare ver. 9. with Ps. xxii. 28. & Matt. ii. 6.

[b] Luke i. 32, 33. ib. ver. 68—75. where the whole subject of the chapter before us is represented as verified in Christ.

[c] Ps. xl. 7, 8.

[d] See while yet a child, Luke ii. 46—49. And during his ministry, he went into the wilderness that he might be tempted, Matt. iv. 1.—he rebuked Peter for dissuading him from suffering, Matt. xvi. 22, 23.—he longed for his bloody baptism, Luke xii. 50.—he resigned himself to suffer all that was necessary, John xii. 27, 28.—nor would he rescue himself (John xviii. 6—9.) or be rescued (Matt. xxvi. 51—54.), or come down from the cross, till he could say, "It is finished," Matt. xxvii. 42.

[e] Ps. cxlviii. 14.

[f] Jonah ii. 2, 4.

But to understand the passage aright, we must notice,

II. The peculiar force of the interrogation—

It is not to be supposed that God asks for information: the inquiry is rather expressive of his most cordial approbation.

God delighted in the mediation of his dear Son—

[In the prospect of this event, the Father delighted in him before man had fallen, or the world itself was formed[g]. And he commanded his prophet to announce, that he was "well pleased for his righteousness' sake[h]," not only before he had wrought out that righteousness, but hundreds of years before he became incarnate. No sooner did the Lord Jesus enter on his work, than the Father, by an audible voice from heaven, attested that he was "well pleased with him." The same testimony he bore, and in the same manner, on two other occasions: and in all his other dispensations towards him, he evinced that Jesus was "his elect, in whom his soul delighted[i]." If at any time that approbation could be supposed to be withheld, it would be while the Father hid his face from him on the cross, or smote him with the sword of justice: but in reference to that very period we are told, that "it pleased the Father to bruise him[k];" and that "the sacrifice then offered was of a sweet-smelling savour[m]."]

He delights also in the approaches of a sinner to his footstool—

["The prayer of the upright is his delight." If in heaven "there is joy among the angels in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth," doubtless that God, in whose presence they are, approves and participates their joy. The representation given of him in the parable of the Prodigal Son, both countenances and confirms this sentiment, yea, to such a degree is he pleased with the supplications of a repenting sinner, that he would rather withdraw his eyes from every other object, whether in heaven or on earth, than not direct them especially towards him[n]. See this exemplified in Saul of Tarsus: no sooner had that bloodthirsty persecutor begun to humble himself before his Maker, than God sent a special Messenger to his relief, assigning this as the reason, "Behold, he prayeth[o]!" Thus at this time, if he see any of his rebellious creatures prostrating themselves before him, and

[g] Prov. viii. 22, 23, 30. [h] Isai. xlii. 21. [i] ib. ver. 1.
[k] Isai. liii. 10. This passage marks the pleasure which God took, not indeed in inflicting punishment on his Son, but in making him a substitute for sinful man.
[m] Eph. v. 2. [n] Isai. lxvi. 2. [o] Acts ix. 10, 11.

and earnestly imploring mercy, he will say, "*Who is this?* Is this the creature that I beheld so recently in arms against me? Is this he who seemed to hurl defiance in my face? is it he, who now so humbly engages his heart to approach unto me? O, he is my dear son; he is a pleasant child: my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him for evermore[p]."]

APPLICATION—

[Are there any amongst you that can answer to the inquiry, "Lord, it is I: I find my need of thee: I have engaged my heart in thy service; and am determined, through thy grace, that I will never go back?" Let me congratulate you, my Brethren: for "blessed is the man whom God chooses, and causes to approach unto him[q]." Be thoroughly in earnest, and take care that you do not, after putting your hand to the plough, look back again.

Are there any who are constrained to say, "I would gladly make such a reply; but my rebellious heart revolts, and will not obey the dictates of my judgment?" Then I would bid them to mark the words before the text; "I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me." If any go unto him, it is not owing to their own superior goodness or strength, but to the attractive influences of God's Spirit. Adopt then the petition of the Church of old, and then you may with confidence adopt her engagement also, "Draw me, and we will run after thee[r]:" "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart[s]."]

[p] Jer. xxxi. 18—20.
[q] Ps. lxv. 4.
[r] Cant. i. 4.
[s] Ps. cxix. 32.

DLXV.

GRACIOUS INFLUENCES THE FRUIT OF ELECTING LOVE.

Jer. xxxi. 3. *The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*

THERE is a most glorious connexion subsisting between the Lord and his people: He is their God, even "the God of all the families of Israel;" and they are his people, devoted altogether to his service. He is the God of every individual, as much as if no other object of his love existed in the whole creation besides; and they are his exclusively, and without reserve. But here two questions arise: How are they

they brought into this connexion with him? and, From whence does this exalted privilege arise? Our text enables us to answer these questions; and we will answer them in their order.

I. How are God's people brought into this glorious connexion with him?

Our text informs us, that they are "drawn" to it by the Father himself. We shall therefore answer this first question by shewing,

1. How he draws them—

[The term "drawing" is supposed to import somewhat of a force that is inconsistent with the free agency of man: and, were that idea just, we should be found among the first that would oppose such a doctrine as unscriptural and absurd. But the drawings of God's Spirit do not in the least interfere with the liberty of human actions. The drawing of which our text speaks, is "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love[a]:" it is through the medium of the understanding, the will, and the affections; the understanding, as enlightened with divine truth; the will, as determined by sound judgment; and the affections, as engaged by the excellence of those things which the will is bent to follow. True it is, that we cannot precisely declare the manner in which the operations of the Holy Spirit influence the soul; for we do not even know how our own spirit acts upon the body: but we know infallibly, that God does influence the minds of men; not however by making them to act contrary to their will, but by making them "willing in the day of his power[b]."]

2. That their connexion with him is altogether owing to this influence—

[If the most express declarations of Scripture can determine any thing, the point in hand is established beyond a doubt: for our blessed Lord says, that "no man," whatever his quality or talents, "can come to him," in the exercise of true faith, "unless the Father draw him[c]." This testimony is decisive. But the truth of the point established by it is no less clear, from the representation which the Scriptures give us of the work which is wrought on the minds of all who are truly brought to God. It is called "a creation[d]," which we all know to be the work of God; and a resurrection from the dead, which is equally beyond any finite power to effect[e]. Whatever may be supposed to have effected the good work within us, it is expressly excluded, that God may have all the glory[f]. If it be said, that such difficulties exist

[a] Hos. xi. 4. [b] Ps. cx. 3. [c] John vi. 44.
[d] Eph. ii. 10. [e] Eph. ii. 1. with i. 19, 20.
[f] John i. 13. Rom. xi. 16.

exist only in more abandoned characters, we answer, that the Apostles themselves put themselves, in this respect, on a level with the vilest of mankind[g]; and thereby fully confirm the testimony of our Lord above cited.]

The next question that arises is,

II. To what must this exalted mercy be traced?

Is it any peculiar fitness in this or that man, which occasions God to single *him* out as an object to be drawn by him; or is the mercy vouchsafed by God to whomsoever he will, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure? We cannot hesitate to declare, that the whole of salvation, from first to last, is purely of grace.

[St. Paul himself was constrained to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and, of course, every one else must do the same. But we cannot but have observed, on many occasions, how indignantly the natural man revolts from this doctrine. We do not doubt the sovereignty of God in rescuing man from destruction rather than the fallen angels; or in making the Jews his peculiar people, in preference to all others upon earth; or in selecting Isaac and Jacob whilst he rejected Ishmael and Esau: nor can we doubt that we ourselves, as enjoying the light of revelation, are objects of his sovereign choice, when we see far the greater part of mankind involved in midnight darkness: and yet we cannot endure the doctrine, when applied to the more immediate communication of God's mercy to our souls. But to God's everlasting love is our salvation ascribed in our text; and to that alone can it with truth or propriety ever be ascribed: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; *therefore* with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."]

Now this is the plain doctrine of Scripture—

[God does not love us because we first loved him, but "we love him because he first loved us[h]." It was thus also with the Apostles themselves: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain[i]." To us the terms, Election and Predestination, almost sound like blasphemy: but the Apostles did not view them in this light: they considered every blessing we enjoy as the fruit of God's electing love, and of his sovereign will predestinating us from all eternity to the enjoyment of it[k]——— They are particularly careful to exclude all works of ours from forming a ground of God's electing love, lest we should boast as having in some degree merited his favour[l]. The

[g] Eph. ii. 3—5. Tit. iii. 3—6. [h] 1 John iv. 19.
[i] John xv. 16. [k] See Eph. i. 3—6. & 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.
[l] 2 Tim. i. 9.

The whole tenor of the Scriptures shews, that "God hath compassion on whom he will have compassion [m];" and that his people are "a remnant according to the election of grace [n]."]

And in relation to this subject God is peculiarly jealous—

[How strongly did he guard his people of old against imagining that his distinguishing favour to them was founded in any superior goodness of theirs [o]! In like manner he puts it to us; "Who made thee to differ? and What hast thou which thou hast not received? and, If thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it [p]?" The whole of his Gospel is purposely designed to cut off all ground of glorying from man, that God alone may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ [q].]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who cannot receive this doctrine—

[Would it not be well to search and examine what is the real foundation of your objections to it? Nothing can be more clear, than that the doctrine of Divine influences pervades the holy Scriptures, and that those influences are constantly represented as imparted to men according to God's sovereign will and pleasure: yet the generality of men reject those doctrines merely because they cannot explain all the difficulties involved in them. But does the denial of these doctrines involve no difficulties? Yes indeed, and incomparably greater: nor is there a single doctrine, even of natural religion, and much more of that which is revealed, that has not some difficulty attached to it. But the truth is, that our proud hearts do not like to be so stripped of all goodness, or to be made so entirely dependent on God. Here is the root of the whole controversy: and, when once the soul is humbled in the dust before God, we shall readily receive God's declarations without gainsaying, and thankfully accept his mercy as a free unmerited gift.

But it is not wise for persons who are mere novices in religion to be disputing about abstract doctrines: it were better far to seek after God according to the light they have. All must acknowledge, that they ought to take God as their God, and to give themselves to him as his people. Let me then urge you to do this with your whole hearts: and we have no fear but that, if once you be enabled to do this, you will say, "Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be the praise."]

3. To those who profess to have the experience of it in their own souls—

[Have

[m] Rom. ix. 15. [n] Rom. xi. 5. [o] Deut. vii. 7, 8.
[p] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [q] Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9. 1 Cor. i. 28, 29.

[Have you been "drawn" by Divine grace? and have you a good hope that you are of the number of God's elect? Then remember for what end he has drawn you, and for what end he has chosen you: it has been to make you "a holy and a peculiar people to himself." Has he chosen you? it is "*that you should be holy*[r]." Has he predestinated you? it is "*to be conformed to the image of his Son*[s]." Has he created you anew? it is "*unto good works, which God hath before ordained that you should walk in them*[t]." Hence God makes the consideration of his electing love a motive and a reason for following after holiness of heart and life: "The Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them; and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise *therefore* the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked[u]." Oh, beg of him that you may be enabled thus to improve the blessings he has conferred upon you. This will best "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," who imagine that the doctrines of grace are subversive of morality, and that the honour which you give to God is only a cloke for idleness and sin. For this end alone are the drawings of God's Spirit desirable, namely, to make you more holy, more spiritual, more heavenly than any person without those influences can be. Say then, with the Church of old, "Draw me, and I will run after thee[x];" and prove, by the steadiness in your heavenly course, that you do not pray in vain, and that God does not bestow upon you his grace in vain.]

2. To those who desire to embrace and feel it—

[Many there are who wish to submit to the revealed will of God, and yet never can contemplate his sovereignty without a fear and dread arising in their souls: but this is occasioned by their looking only on the dark side of the question, and thinking what must become of them if they are not elect: they contemplate sovereignty in connexion only with justice, and not in connexion with love and mercy. If they turned their thoughts more to his everlasting *love*, they would soon feel its attracting and constraining influence. We do not say that terror is not often made use of by God to awaken men; but it is by "*loving-kindness* that he draws" them into sweet communion with himself. Think then *generally* of his love *to man*, in providing redemption for him when he had passed by the fallen angels without any such gracious provision for their restoration to his favour: from thence proceed to think more particularly of his love *to you*, in having sent you the tidings of his salvation, and in having given you a desire to possess an interest in it: and you will then soon find a sweet confidence springing up in your souls: you

[r] Eph. i. 4. [s] Rom. viii. 29. [t] Eph. ii. 10.
[u] Deut. x. 15, 16. [x] Cant. i. 4.

you will look to him as a Father; you will regard him as a Friend; you will feel encouragement to cast yourselves upon him, and pleasure in giving up yourselves to his service. Seek only to know how much he has loved you, and you will soon be constrained to love him, and to delight yourselves in him.]

DLXVI.

THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS.

Jer. xxxi. 8, 9. *Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child, and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

THE language in which the Prophets speak of the return of the Jews from Babylon, necessitates us to look to some other event for a full accomplishment of their predictions. In a measure, they were fulfilled in the conversion of so many myriads to God in the Apostolic age: but they will receive their final completion in the Millennial period, when all flesh shall see the salvation of God. In speaking of those whom God would bring back from their captivity, and by whom he would re-establish his worship upon Mount Zion, the prophet has respect to those who should come out from their earthly bondage to serve God in the Church of Christ. He here gives us a highly figurative description of,

I. Their character—

If we should select those who were of all others most incapable of undertaking a journey of many hundred miles through a trackless desert, we should certainly fix on those mentioned in the text: yet those are the persons specified by God as chosen by him for that very purpose. We cannot doubt but that something peculiarly important is intended to be conveyed under this striking representation. It implies then, we apprehend,

1. That

1. That there are no discouragements which God will not enable us to surmount—

[Persons, when exhorted to begin their journey heavenward, are ready to urge the peculiarity of their situation and circumstances, either *as an excuse for their not attempting the work*, or *as a reason for procrastination*. But however specious their pleas may be (and certainly none can appear stronger than those which the persons referred to in the text might offer), God would have them to know, that, under his auspices, the feeblest person in the universe may undertake the hardest services, assured that "through Christ strengthening him he shall be able to do all things[a]." "The blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness[b];" "the lame man shall leap as an hart[c];" "the travailing woman shall be delivered without pain" or consequent weakness[d]; the very dead shall arise out of their graves, to perform the functions of life[dd]; nor shall any thing be impossible to them that believe[e].

Let none then excuse themselves on account of ignorance or weakness, or wait for a more convenient season; but rather let all with one heart obey the call of God, and go forth "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." As on the departure of Israel from Egypt "there was not one feeble person among their tribes[f]," so neither shall there be one at this time whose "strength shall not be according to his day[g]."]

2. That God has chosen those who are in the most discouraging circumstances, on purpose that his own power may be the more displayed and glorified—

[If none but the strong and active were to enter on the Christian course, or none but the moral and the wise were to embrace the truth, we should be ready to ascribe the glory to man. But God has reserved all the glory to himself, by taking the poor and ignorant and vile in preference to others[h], and by converting them to himself through the instrumentality of the weakest means[i]. Apparent discouragements therefore may rather operate to increase our expectations of more effectual aid; since the weaker we are in ourselves, the more will Christ's strength be perfected in our weakness[k]. Instead of pleading our unfitness and imbecillity as reasons for declining the path of duty, we should rather glory in our unfitness, "that the power of Christ may rest upon us[l]."]

Curious as the description of the persons is, it is not more so than the representation of,

II. Their

[a] Phil. iv. 13.
[b] Isai. xxix. 18.
[c] Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.
[d] Isai. lxvi. 7—9.
[dd] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—12.
[e] Mark ix. 23.
[f] Ps. cv. 37.
[g] Deut. xxxiii. 25.
[h] 1 Cor. i. 26—29.
[i] 2 Cor. iv. 7.
[k] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[l] ib. ver. 10.

II. Their journey—

Many there have been, and infinitely more shall there hereafter be, even "a multitude that no man can number," who shall be brought to Zion. But how shall they come? Their journey is here described,

1. In its commencement—

["Weeping and supplication" well become those who are "turning from the power of Satan unto God." How can they reflect on their former bondage without the deepest humiliation, or without crying mightily to God for pardon and deliverance? How can they stir one step towards Zion, and not be overwhelmed with admiring and adoring thoughts of God's goodness to them, and intreating that the good work which he has begun may be carried on and perfected in their souls? The more ardent their desire is after God, the more will weeping and prayer abound in their experience[m].]

2. In its progress—

[As the journey from Babylon to Judea was both wearisome and dangerous, especially for persons circumstanced as the Jews were in their return to Zion, so the Christian's path lies through many difficulties and dangers. But God promises him the things he so much needs; *refreshing consolation*, and *unerring direction*.

There are times when the "souls of God's people are discouraged by reason of the way[n]." Their trials and temptations overwhelm their spirit; and they would "utterly fail," if not succoured by seasonable communications of grace and peace. But God has provided a Comforter for them, even the Holy Ghost, whom he will send into their drooping and desponding souls, and by whose agency he will revive and strengthen them[o]. None can be in so distressed a state, but they shall have "rivers" of consolation at hand for their refreshment[p].

Is their path peculiarly intricate and slippery? God will "make their way plain before their face:" "the rough places shall be plain, and the crooked paths straight." In seasons of difficulty "they shall hear a voice behind them saying, This is the way, walk ye in it[q]." And if at any time their foot slide, he will put "his everlasting arms underneath them," and uphold them that they may not fall.

Of these seasonable communications the Christian may be assured, because of the near relation in which he stands to God himself. "God is his father, and considers him as his first-born[qq]." Whatever therefore is suited to that high relation shall certainly

[m] Zech. xii. 10. with Jer. l. 4, 5. [n] Numb. xxi. 4. Ps. cvii. 4, 5.
[o] Isai. xliii. 19, 20. & xl. 29—31. [p] Isai. xli. 17, 18.
[q] Isai. xxx. 21. & xxxv. 8. [qq] Exod. iv. 22, 23.

certainly be imparted to him, in such a measure, and such a manner, as shall most conduce to his eternal welfare.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are yet in a state of bondage—

[Whatever diversity there may be in the states and characters of those who return to Zion, there is not one who does not see abundant reason to class himself among those mentioned in the text: and if we have never felt ourselves in a state resembling theirs, we may be assured that we are yet in bondage to sin and Satan. Behold then, to such persons we have a message from God himself: as God's "watchmen, we would cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God[r]!" Make no excuses, no delays. The Lord Jesus Christ has "proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Be not then like those in Babylon, who, because of their comfortable settlements there, sat down regardless of the holy land: but put yourselves under the guidance of your Divine Leader; brave the dangers and difficulties of the way; and look to the honour and felicity of serving him, as an ample recompence for all that you can do or suffer in the ways of his appointment.]

2. Those who are travelling towards Zion—

[Adored be God, who "has brought you out with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm!" But beware how you ever think of returning to your former bondage; for "then will your last end be worse than your beginning[s]." You must expect difficulties: your faith and patience will be tried: it is "through faith and patience that you must inherit the promises[t]." But, when God is for you, you need not care who or what is against you. Only "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God:" "in the mount of difficulty the Lord will be seen[u]:" though you are no better armed than Gideon's band with their lamps and pitchers, you shall put to flight all that oppose your progress[x]: and though you are as unfit for exertion as a travailing woman, you shall reach in safety the Zion that is above.]

[r] ver. 6. [s] 2 Pet. ii. 20. [t] Heb. vi. 12.
[u] Gen. xxii. 14. [x] Judg. vii. 20, 21.

DLXVII.

THE PREACHED GOSPEL A SOURCE OF BLESSINGS TO THE WORLD.

Jer. xxxi. 10—14. *Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattereth*

Israel will gather him; and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come, and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their souls shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord.

THERE is a beauty and richness in the Inspired Volume which is not to be found in any human composition: and we cannot but consider it as a very serious injury to the Church, that the habit of expounding Scripture, which was so prevalent amongst the Reformers, is now almost wholly laid aside. Though we may speak many good things from a detached portion of Scripture, yet we never can give so great weight to any passage by our own comments, as it receives from its own context: and the more entirely God himself is permitted to speak, provided there be unity in the subject, the better. Take the passage which we have just read: it is capable of being made the ground-work of many discourses; but the force and interest which it derives from being considered in one connected view, would be lost. It is an exceedingly beautiful portion of Holy Writ; holding forth to our view,

I. The tidings which we are commissioned to declare—

In its primary view, doubtless, we must regard the passage as a prophecy of the Jews' deliverance from Babylon: for though it speaks of redemption as already effected, it must be understood as effected only in the Divine purpose; which made it as sure, as if it had already taken place. But there is proof in abundance that it refers to a far greater deliverance, even that of a ruined world, through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. The tidings

of

of it are proclaimed "to *the nations*, and the isles afar off:" nor can it be said, that the Jews after their return from Babylon did "not sorrow any more at all;" because their sorrows at, and since, the destruction of their City and Temple by the Romans, have far exceeded all that they ever endured before. Indeed, the very words following our text, prove indisputably that the whole chapter refers, in part at least, to the times of the Gospel. Without hesitation therefore we interpret our text in that view; (there are many other internal evidences that we ought to do so;) and regard it as declaring,

1. That God has redeemed his people—

[This he has done, "not by corruptible things, but by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot." Our Lord himself tells us, that "he gave his life a ransom for many." When the strong man armed kept possession of us, HE came upon him, and vanquished him, and took from him those whom the Father had set apart as his chosen people. True it is, that he himself died in the conflict; but it was by death that he gained the victory: "By death he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered those who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage."

This is one part of the glad tidings which we bring to you. We find you in bondage to sin and Satan: we know that it is impossible for you ever to deliver yourselves; and we proclaim, as God's ambassadors, a free, a full, an everlasting redemption to you all. We "say to the prisoners, Go forth; and to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves."]

2. That our Redeemer will both gather his sheep, and keep them—

[He it is, even our incarnate God, who searches out his sheep, and gathereth them unto himself. Whatever means or instruments he may use, he it is who bringeth them home upon his shoulders rejoicing. This, together with all his subsequent care of us, is clearly stated by the Prophet Ezekiel[a], as indeed in many other parts of the Inspired Writings. The tender solicitude with which he will "keep" us, is particularly deserving of our attention. "He will carry the lambs in his bosom, and will gently lead them that are with young." Are they assaulted by any enemy? he tells us, under two beautiful images, how carefully, and effectually, he will preserve us; even as a bird that intercepts

[a] Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16.

110972

intercepts the stroke with which her young are menaced, or as the attendant angel warded off the sword of the destroying angel, and constrained him to *pass over* every house that was sprinkled with the blood of the paschal lamb[b]. But our blessed Lord himself has told us, that "none shall ever prevail to pluck so much as one of his sheep out of his hand[c]."

This is the other part of the message which we are commissioned to deliver to a ruined world. Neither of the parts must be omitted: they form one great and glorious whole: and we do declare with unspeakable joy, that as Christ is "the Author of faith" to his chosen people, so will he be also "the Finisher of it," perfecting it in their hearts, and "preserving them blameless unto his heavenly kingdom;" for "it is not the will of his Father that one of his little ones should perish."]

Such are the tidings which it were an honour even to an angel to bring; more especially when we consider,

II. The effects to be produced by them—

At the decree of Cyrus, multitudes embraced the opportunity to shake off the yoke, and to return to their deserted country. And may we not hope that a similar effect will attend such a proclamation as this? Yes: it is here foretold, that,

1. Many shall desire spiritual blessings—

[The terms here used seem to confine the subject to *temporal* blessings: and it is true, that, as far as the passage relates to the return of the Jews from Babylon, *temporal* blessings are intended. But they were *typical of spiritual* blessings. And indeed the terms here used, denote in a more especial manner those *holy things* which, under the Law, were offered unto God; and, consequently, those things which, under the Gospel, both honour God, and refresh his people. The word then, and ordinances, are especially intended, together with those communications of grace and peace with which the ordinances are attended. These were supreme objects of desire to Christians in the Apostolic age; and they are so still, wherever the Gospel comes with power to the soul. This is intimated by the expression, "*flowing together*" to the goodness of the Lord. There is a *motion* of the renewed soul towards God, and a delightful *union and concert* in relation to this matter, amongst all who embrace the truth as it is in Jesus. This union of sentiment and affection amongst the Lord's people, together with a particular regard to the word and ordinances as the object of it, is mentioned by the prophet Isaiah, with this additional circumstance, that this *flowing* of their souls towards

[b] Isai. xxxi. 4, 5. [c] John x. 27—29.

towards God is *contrary to the course of nature*, seeing that "the mountain of the Lord's House is set on the top of the mountains;" and the people "flow," *not down from it*, but *up to it*; yea, "all nations," through the impulse thus given them, shall ascend even to the height of heaven itself.

And do not many of you bear witness that this effect is produced? Are not spiritual blessings with many of you the supreme objects of desire; so that if asked, "Who will shew us any good?" you without hesitation reply, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us; and that shall put more gladness in our hearts, than any increase of corn or wine or oil can do[d]?"]

2. They shall find the most abundant joy and satisfaction in them—

[This is declared in our text *figuratively*, under the images of singing and dancing; and then *plainly*, as "a turning of sorrow into joy." And this is truly the case when a humble and contrite soul hears of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The burthen of sin then falls off; the fears of everlasting wrath are dispelled; the peace of God flows down into the soul; and sighs and tears are turned into "thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." This is the case not with "the old" only, who are weak and superannuated; or with "the young," who are giddy and enthusiastic; but with persons of all ages, and all conditions: there is but one feeling pervading them all, "the young and the old," the sage philosopher and the uncivilized barbarian: their souls all become "as a watered garden," not only revived and quickened, but "fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness," to the praise and glory of their God." A peculiar union too takes place between the Ministers and their people: whilst the people are refreshed and comforted with the ministrations of their instructors, the Ministers feel in the prosperity of their converts their sublimest joy, and their richest recompence[e].

But there is in the close of our text a beauty which does not strike us at first sight. *The holy things* which were offered unto God under the law, were not to be eaten, except by the priests and their families: but now all may eat of them; since we all are through Christ "an holy priesthood." Moreover, not even the priests under the law were to eat the fat, that being prohibited under the severest penalties[f]: but now all, both priests and people, may "satiate their souls with fatness[g]." And whereas all other things, to whatever extent they may be enjoyed, are empty and unsatisfying, in *these* things they shall find the most perfect satisfaction, so as never to hunger or thirst after any thing else[h]; they shall be completely "satisfied with the goodness of the Lord."]

On

[d] Ps. iv. 6, 7.
[e] 3 John 4. with 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.
[f] 1 Sam. ii. 12—17.
[g] Compare Isai. lv. 2.
[h] John vi. 35.

On a review of this subject we are naturally led to INQUIRE,

1. Whence is it that the Gospel produces so little effect in the present day?

[The glad tidings of redemption through the blood of Christ are *professedly* proclaimed by all who have entered into the Ministerial office: yet in many places no change whatever is wrought in the manners and habits of the people. What can be the reason of this? Has the Gospel lost its power? No: but there is some essential defect in the ministration of it: in many places the doctrine of the cross is not made sufficiently prominent; yea, in some, it is kept almost wholly out of sight; and no other use is made of the atonement and righteousness of Christ than to supply the defects of man's obedience. And where Christ is more fully preached, he is often represented as purchasing only a pardon for our past sins, and then as leaving us to "maintain our warfare at our own cost," and work out our salvation by our own arm: whereas the Scripture speaks of him as not only redeeming his people, but "gathering them" by his own care, and "keeping them" by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation[i]. Now a mutilated Gospel is in reality no Gospel: salvation must be preached as altogether of grace through faith: the whole glory of it belongs to God: nor will he ever honour any Ministry that robs him of it.

But even where the Gospel is most faithfully preached, it produces, in comparison of the Apostolic age, but little effect. The reason of this we apprehend to be, that our hearers, being Christians *in name*, and educated in *a profession* of Christian doctrines, are ready to imagine that they are Christians *in deed*, and that they have *a saving acquaintance* with the Gospel: they are, like the Laodiceans of old, "rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" in their own estimation, and unconscious that "they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked[k]:" and whilst they continue so unconscious of their need of a Redeemer, it is not to be wondered at that they are so little affected with the tidings of redemption. O remember, that a "ransom" implies captivity, and "redemption" bondage: and beg of God to shew you what slaves you have been to sin and Satan, in order that you may appreciate as you ought the Gospel of Christ. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick:" and till you feel your disorder, you will despise the remedy.]

2. What is to be done in order to render it more effectual?

[In

[i] 1 Pet. i. 5. [k] Rev. iii. 17.

[In hearing the Ministers of Christ, we do not sufficiently bear in mind *whose* word it is that they preach unto us, or the deep interest we have in it: we rather consider them as performing an official duty when they deliver a discourse, and ourselves as having performed our duty when we have heard it. But we must have far other views of the Gospel than these: we must consider the word we hear, as *God's* word, and as God's word *to ourselves in particular*. We must consider God as looking down with pity upon us in our destitute condition, and saying, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; for I have found a ransom." We must regard him as longing for our happiness, and seeking to fill us with his richest consolations. In a word, we must view the Gospel as Jeremiah did the ropes and other materials which Ebed-melech let down to extricate him from the dungeon, where he must otherwise have perished. He needed no persuasion to fit the materials to his arms, in order to secure the proffered deliverance[1]: so we should thankfully embrace the salvation of Christ, regarding it as altogether *the fruit of his love*, and *the effect of his power*. Did we but attend the ordinances in such a frame as this, they would soon prove "the power of God to the salvation" of our souls.]

[1] Jer. xxxviii. 9—12.

DLXVIII.

THE NEW COVENANT.

Jer. xxxi. 31—34. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall no more teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know ye the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

THOUGH there is among us a general idea that Christianity is founded on the Jewish religion, yet the specific difference between them is very little understood. It would be well for us to have clear views

views of this subject: for unless we know the comparative excellency of the new covenant above that which it superseded, we can never justly appreciate the great advantages we enjoy. In the passage before us, the Mosaic and Christian covenants are contrasted; and the abolition of the one, and the establishment of the other, are foretold. But before we enter on the comparison between the two, it will be necessary to observe, that there are, properly speaking, only *two* great covenants; under the one or other of which all the world are living: the one is the *Adamic* covenant, which was made with Adam in Paradise, and which is entirely a covenant of works; the other is the *Christian* covenant, which, though made with Christ, and ratified by his blood upon the cross, was more or less clearly revealed from the beginning of the world. It was first announced in that promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." It was afterwards more plainly opened to Abraham, and afterwards still more fully to Moses. The Mosaic covenant, properly speaking, was distinct from both of these: it was not altogether a covenant of works, or a covenant of grace; but it partook of the nature of both. As containing the *moral* law, it was a republication of the covenant of works: and as containing the *ceremonial* law, it was a dark and shadowy representation of the covenant of grace. It was a mixed covenant, designed for one particular nation; and given to them, in order to introduce the covenant under which we live. Of *that* the Prophet says, that it should in due time be superseded by a new and better covenant; and the Apostle, quoting this whole passage, says, that "it had *then* waxed old, and was vanishing away[a]."

In order to give a clear view of this subject, we shall state,

I. The blessings of the new covenant—

These being specified by the Prophet, and copied exactly by the Apostle, we shall adhere strictly to them, without attempting to reduce them to any other

[a] Heb. viii. 8—13.

other order than that which is here observed. In the new covenant, then, God undertakes,

1. To write his law in our hearts—

[This is a work which none but God can effect. The kings were commanded to write a copy of their law, each one for himself: but, though they might write it on parchment, they could not inscribe it on their own hearts. This however God engages to do for all who embrace the new covenant. He will make all the laws which he has revealed, agreeable to us: he will discover to us the excellency of them; and "cause us to delight in them after our inward man." He will make us to see, that the moral "law is holy and just and good," even while it condemns us for our disobedience to its commands; and that "the law of faith" also (that is, the Gospel) is a marvellous exhibition of God's mercy and grace, and exactly suited to the necessities of our souls. He will engage our wills to submit to his; and dispose our souls to put forth all their energies in obedience to his commands. This he has repeatedly promised [b]; and this he will fulfil to all who trust in him.]

2. To establish a relation between himself and us—

[By nature we are enemies to him, and he to us. But on our embracing of this covenant, he will "give himself to us as our God, and take us for his people." In being our God, he will *exercise all his perfections for our good;* his wisdom to guide us, his power to protect us, his love and mercy to make us happy, his truth and faithfulness to preserve us to the end. In taking us for his people, he will incline us to *employ all our faculties in his service.* Our time, our wealth, our influence, yea, all the members of our bodies, and all the powers of our souls, will be used as his, for the accomplishment of his will, and the promotion of his glory. We may see this illustrated in the life of the apostle Paul. God took as much care of him, as if there had been no other creature in the universe; and he devoted himself to God, as much as if his faculties had not been capable of any other use or application. The effects of this relation are not indeed equally visible in all the Lord's people: but the difference is in the degree only, and not in the substance and reality.]

3. To give us the knowledge of himself—

[There is a knowledge of God which cannot be attained by human teaching; a spiritual experimental knowledge, a knowledge accompanied with suitable dispositions and affections. But this God will give to those who lay hold on his covenant: "He will reveal himself to them as he does not unto the world." He will "put them into the cleft of the rock, and make all his glory to pass

[b] Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

pass before their eyes;" and proclaim to them his name, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful, and gracious[c], &c. He has promised, that "all his people shall be taught of him[d]," "the least as well as the greatest," yea, the least often in preference to the greatest[e]. And in proof that this promise is really fulfilled to all who receive the Gospel, St. John declares it to be a known acknowledged fact: "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding to know him that is true[f]."]

4. To pardon all our iniquities—

[Under this new covenant, we have access to "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," and by washing in it "we are cleansed from all sin[g]." Whatever transgressions we may have committed in our unregenerate state, they are all put away; "though they may have been as scarlet, they have become white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool"———]

Hitherto we have spoken only *in a general way* of the blessings of the new covenant: we proceed to notice them *more particularly*, while we state,

II. The difference between the old and new covenants—

We have already observed, that by "the *old* covenant" is meant the Mosaic Covenant, made with the Jews on Mount Sinai. Between this and the Gospel covenant there is a wide difference. They differ,

1. In the freeness of their grants—

[The Mosaic covenant imposed certain conditions to be fulfilled on the part of the Jews; and on their fidelity to their engagements all the blessings of that covenant were suspended[h]. But we find no condition specified in the new covenant. Must we attain the knowledge of God, and become his people; and have his law written in our hearts? true: but these are *not acts of ours*, which God requires *in order to* the bestowing of other blessings upon us; but *blessings which he himself undertakes to give*. If any say, that repentance and faith are *conditions* which we are to perform, we will not dispute about a *term*; you may call them conditions, if you please; but that which we affirm respecting them is, that they constitute a part of God's free grant in the Gospel covenant; so that they are not conditions, in the same sense that the obedience of the Jews was the condition upon which they held the Promised Land: they are, as

[c] Exod. xxxiii. 18—23. & xxxiv. 5, 7.
[d] Isai. liv. 13. John vi. 45.
[e] Matt. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.
[f] 1 John v. 20.
[g] 1 John i. 7.
[h] Exod. xxiv. 6—8.

as we have just said, blessings freely given us by God; and not acts of ours, whereon to found our claim to other blessings.

It is worthy of observation, that the Apostle, mentioning this grant of the new covenant, particularly specifies, that God, "*finding fault with*" the Jews for their violations of the old covenant, says, "I will make a new covenant[i]." Had he said, "*Commending them* for their observation of the inferior covenant, God said, I will give you a better covenant," we might have supposed, that it was given as a reward for services performed: but when it was given in consequence of the hopeless state to which their violations of the former covenant had reduced them, the freeness of this covenant appears in the strongest light.]

2. In the extent of their provisions—

[We shall again notice the different blessings as they lie in our text. God wrote his law *upon tables of stone*, and put it into *the hands* of those with whom his old covenant was made: but, according to his new covenant, he undertakes to put it into *our inward parts*, and to write it on *our hearts*. What a glorious difference is this! and how beautifully and exultingly does the Apostle point it out to his Corinthian converts[j]!

God established indeed a relation between himself and his people of old: but this relation, though nominally the same with ours, was by no means realized to the same extent. To true Believers amongst them he was the same that he now is: but what was he to the people at large, with whom the covenant was made? He interposed for them doubtless, on many occasions, *in an external way;* and they *externally* acknowledged him: but his communications to us are *internal*, and our devotion to him is *real* and *spiritual*.

Under the old covenant, God revealed himself to his people in types and shadows; and the ceremonies which he appointed were so dark and various, that they could not be known to the generality, unless the people carefully instructed each other. On this account it was commanded that the children should inquire into the reason of various institutions, (as that of the passover, and the feast of unleavened bread, and the redemption of the first-born;) and their parents were to explain them[k]. But with us, there are only two institutions, and those the plainest that can be imagined; and the great truths of our religion are so interwoven with our feelings, that a person whose desires are after God, needs no other teaching than that of God's word and Spirit: and though the instructions of Ministers, of masters, and of parents, are still extremely useful, yet may a person obtain the knowledge of God and of salvation without being indebted to any one of them: and it is a fact, that many persons remote from ordinances, and from instruction of every kind, except the blessed

[i] Heb. viii. 8. [j] 2 Cor. iii. 3.
[k] Exod. xii. 26, 27, & xiii. 8, 14, 15.

blessed book of God, are often so richly taught by the Spirit of God, as to put to shame those who enjoy the greatest external advantages[l].

The forgiveness of sins which was vouchsafed under the old covenant, was not such as to bring peace into the conscience of the offender: ("the sacrifices which he offered, could not make him perfect as pertaining to the conscience[ll]:) nor indeed were any means appointed for the obtaining of pardon for some particular offences: but under the new covenant, "all who believe are justified from *all things*, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses[m]:" and, "being justified by faith, they have *peace* with God[n]," "a peace that passeth understanding," "a joy unspeakable and glorified."

How glorious does the new covenant appear in this contrasted view! and what reason have we to adore our God for the rich provisions contained in it!]

3. In the duration of their benefits—

[The annual repetition of the same sacrifices under the old covenant was intended to intimate to the people, that their pardon was not final: had their guilt been perfectly removed by them, the Apostle observes very justly, that "they would then have ceased to be offered; because the worshippers would have had no more conscience of sins:" but, inasmuch as the sacrifices were annually renewed, they were, in fact, no more than "*a remembrance of sins* made every year[o]." But under the new covenant God engages to "*remember* our sins and iniquities *no more*:" they are not only *forgiven* by him, but *forgotten*; not only *cancelled*, but "*blotted out* as a morning cloud[p];" not only *removed from before his face*, but "*cast behind his back into the depths of the sea*[q]." His former people he put away, "though he was an husband unto them:" but to us his gifts and callings are without repentance[r]." This is particularly marked by the Prophet, in the verses following our text[rr]; and by an inspired Apostle, in his comment on the very words we are considering. He is shewing the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that appointed under the law: and he confirms his position from this circumstance; that the sacrifices offered by the Levitical priests could never take away sin, and therefore were continually repeated; whereas Christ's sacrifice, *once offered*, would *for ever* take away sin, and "perfect *for ever* all them that are sanctified." He then adduces the very words of our text; and says, that, in these words, "*the Holy Ghost is a witness to us*;" for that,

[l] See 1 John ii. 27. Where the Apostle manifestly refers to the expressions in our text.

[ll] Heb. ix. 9. [m] Acts xiii. 39. [n] Rom. v. 1.

[o] Heb. x. 1—3. [p] Isai. xliv. 22. [q] Mic. vii. 91.

[r] Rom. xi. 29. [rr] ver. 35—37.

that, in promising first, that "the law should be written in our hearts," and then, that "our sins and iniquities should be remembered no more," he had attested fully the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, and given ample assurance, that those who relied upon it should *never* have their sins imputed to them[s].

It is needless to multiply words any further upon this subject; for the old covenant, with all its benefits, was to continue only for a limited period; whereas the new covenant is to continue to the end of the world; and its benefits, to the remotest ages of eternity.]

INFER,

1. The folly of making self-righteous covenants of our own—

[Why did God give us another covenant, but because the former was inadequate to our necessities? Shall we then be recurring to the old covenant, or forming new ones of our own upon the same principle? Take your own covenants, and examine them, and see what grounds of hope they afford you. We will give you leave to dictate your own terms: say, if you please, "You are to repent and amend your lives; and *on those conditions* God shall give you eternal life:" *Can* you repent, *can* you amend your lives, by any power of your own? Have you agreed with God what shall be the precise measure of your repentance and amendment? Have you attained the measure which you yourselves think to be necessary, so that you can say, My conscience witnesses for me, that I am fully prepared to meet my God? If not, see to what a state you reduce yourselves: you need none other to condemn you: for God may say, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee." O be not thus infatuated: cast not away the Lord's covenant for such delusive projects of your own: but, instead of depending on your own weak endeavours, go and lay hold on that better covenant, which provides every thing for you, as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus.]

2. The blessedness of those who obey the Gospel—

[You have "a covenant which is ordered in all things, and sure[t]:" and you have a Mediator, who, having purchased for you all the blessings of this covenant, will infallibly secure them to you by his efficacious grace, and all-prevailing intercession. Place then your confidence in him. Employ him daily (if I may so speak) to maintain your interest in it; and give him the glory of every blessing you receive. Your enjoyment of its benefits must be progressive, as long as you continue in the world ——— Let your desires after them be more and more enlarged: and in due time you shall enjoy them in all their fulness. It is in heaven alone that you will fully possess them: but there you shall perfectly comprehend the meaning of that promise, "Ye shall be my people; and I will be your God[u]."

[s] Heb. x. 11—18. [t] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. [u] Rev. xxi. 3.

DLXIX.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER.

Jer. xxxiii. 3. *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

IT is curious to observe in what different estimation the same persons are held by their fellow-creatures and by God. We may certainly be allowed to say, that there was not, at the time referred to in our text, a more holy person upon earth than Jeremiah; yet by his countrymen was he held in such abhorrence, as to be deemed worthy only of imprisonment and death. God, on the contrary, honoured him with the highest tokens of his regard. As a friend, (so to speak) he repeatedly visited him in prison; he encouraged him to inquire into his most secret counsels, and confided to him the most stupendous mysteries both of his providence and grace.

We need not however confine our attention to Jeremiah: for the words, though primarily addressed to him, may well be applied to all who suffer for righteousness sake, and to all who are truly devoted to their God. In this view, they accord with many other passages of Scripture; and contain a most important truth, namely, that prayer is the *necessary* and *effectual* means of obtaining divine knowledge.

I. It is necessary—

God is always represented as the fountain of light and truth—

[He is "the Father of lights:" and whatever light there is in the whole creation, it is all derived from him. There are indeed amongst us stars of greater and smaller magnitude; but all in themselves are opaque, and destitute of any native lustre: they shine only by a borrowed light, and are glorious only in proportion as they reflect a greater or less portion of Jehovah's beams. Even where their knowledge is only in arts and sciences, it must be traced to God as its author; much more must it be so, when it pertains to things which the natural man is not able to receive. "In the hearts of all that are wise-hearted, I have put wisdom[a]."]

Those who would obtain knowledge from him, must seek it by prayer—

This

[a] Exod. xxxi. 3, 6.

[This is God's command. He needs not indeed to be prevailed upon by our solicitations, as though he were of himself averse to grant us his blessings; but still it is our duty to pray unto him; and he teaches us to expect his blessings only in the discharge of this duty: "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find:" "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God; and it shall be given him." We are far from saying that prayer is the *only* mean of obtaining knowledge; for we must read, and meditate, and search after truth, as much as if all depended on our own unaided exertions: but we say, that our exertions without prayer will be of no avail: we must "search for knowledge, as for hid treasures;" but we must also "cry after it, and lift up our voice for understanding:" when we combine the two, "then shall we find the knowledge of God: for *the Lord giveth* wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding[b]."]

Nor is this an arbitrary, but a wise and gracious appointment—

[By this means our hearts are prepared for the reception of Divine knowledge. If we could obtain it purely by our own study, we should pride ourselves in it, as having made ourselves to differ from those around us: but when we have been made sensible that it is God alone who "openeth the eyes of the understanding," we learn to acknowledge him in our gifts, and to humble ourselves in proportion to the benefits we have received at his hands. We are stirred up also to improve our knowledge as a talent committed to us, and to diffuse, for the benefit of others, the light with which God has irradiated us.]

As all are invited to ask, so every prayer shall be heard and answered—

II. It shall be effectual—

The things which God shewed to Jeremiah, related, not merely to the return of the Jews from Babylon, but to Christ and his spiritual kingdom[c]: and, respecting Christ, "he will shew great and mighty things unto all that ask him."

1. To the ignorant—

[Little do the world imagine what great and glorious things are known to those whom they despise; things, "which prophets and kings in vain desired to see," and "which angels themselves desire to look into." It is possible enough that the truths themselves, *as a system*, may be known to the ungodly: but, in their *use*,

[b] Prov. ii. 1—6. [c] ver. 14—16.

use, their *excellence*, their *importance*, they are known to those only who are taught of God. To these God has revealed the source and depth of their own depravity; the suitableness and sufficiency of Christ's atonement; the fulness of grace that is treasured up in him; and the blessedness of all those who experience his salvation. These things, "great and mighty" as they are, are brought to their minds "with power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance:" and, by the revelation of them to their souls, they are "made wise unto salvation."]

2. To the enlightened—

[It is not at first only that "God brings us into marvellous light:" there is, in the spiritual, as well as the natural world, a progress from the glimmering of the early dawn to the splendor of the noon-day sun. Job had known much of God by the hearing of the ear; but far more when he could say, "Now mine eye seeth thee:" and Moses had bright discoveries of Jehovah on various occasions; but brighter far, when God was pleased to "proclaim to him his name," and "make all his glory pass before his eyes." Thus, however advanced the Believer may be in knowledge and in grace, there are in God, and in the wonders of his redeeming love, heights and depths and lengths and breadths, of which he has yet no adequate conception. Not that any fresh truths shall be revealed to him, much less any which are not contained in the Holy Scriptures: but the same truths shall be applied to his soul with a clearness and energy vastly surpassing any thing he has before experienced, provided he give himself unto prayer, and wait upon God for the teachings of his Spirit: "The light of the moon shall be to him as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days[d]."]

We shall CONCLUDE this subject with a word,

1. Of reproof—

[Scarcely any subject is so reprobated by ungodly men, as this. They consider the influences of the Holy Spirit as chimerical; and all expectation of answers to prayer, as enthusiastic and absurd. They have never experienced these things themselves; and therefore they suppose that no one else can. But they have never used the means; how then should they attain the end? Suppose a person to affirm, that, with the help of glasses, he could see things invisible to the naked eye: would not any one, refusing to make the experiment, be justly deemed unreasonable, if he denied the possibility of such a thing, and imputed the affirmations of the other to vanity and folly? Every one knows, that objects dimly seen, may be made clearly visible by the use of glasses: and why may not the acquisition of an humble contrite frame be equally useful to the eye of our minds? There is not any one so ignorant,

[d] Isai. xxx. 26.

ignorant, as not to know, how passion and interest distort the objects that are seen through them; and that they who are under their influence, view things very differently from what they appear to an impartial judge. Thus then it is in spiritual things; "whilst the eye is evil, the whole mind is dark; but when it is single, the whole is full of light:" and when God, by removing our earthly and carnal dispositions, presents heavenly objects to the soul in their true character, they shine with a lustre inconceivable to the blind ungodly world. Would any then ascertain whether God will teach his people? let him pray: but let him pray with sincerity, with fervour, and with faith: these are the requisites of effectual prayer[e]; ——— and prayer thus offered, shall never go forth in vain.]

2. Of encouragement—

[Many are discouraged because they have not those manifestations of God to their souls, which they have heard, and read of, in the experience of others. But have they mortified their in-dwelling lusts as much as others; and been as constant and importunate in prayer? But be it so: "God gives to every one severally as he will:" yet none shall ever say, that they have sought his face in vain. Our talent may be small; our capacity narrow and contracted: yet have we no cause to despond: for God has said, that "he will reveal to babes and sucklings the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent:" and if only we were more conscientious in looking to God for his blessing on the ordinances; if, before we come to them, while we are under them, and after we have returned from them, we were earnest in prayer for the influences of his Spirit; we should not so often return from them empty and unedified. God would hear us, and "would answer us, and would shew us great and mighty things, which we know not." Our private meditations also on his blessed word would be attended with "an unction which should teach us all things[f]." He would "open our understandings to understand the Scriptures." "At the very beginning of our supplication" would he send his Holy Spirit to instruct us[g]; yea, "before we called, God would answer; and while we were yet speaking, he would hear[h]."]

[e] See Ps. cxlv. 18, 19. Jer. xxix. 12. Jam. i. 5—7.
[f] 1 John ii. 20, 27. [g] Dan. ix. 20—23. [h] Isai. lxv. 24.

DLXX.

DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD CONDEMNED.

Jer. xxxv. 13, 14. *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my*

words? saith the Lord. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: Notwithstanding, I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me.

THE service of God is called, by St. Paul, "a reasonable service:" and that it is most reasonable, appears, as from numberless other arguments, so especially from this, that we ourselves exact of our fellow-creatures that very kind of service which God requires from us. A father expects to be honoured by his children; and a master to be feared and obeyed by his servants: and God, acknowledging the equity of those expectations, says, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear[a]?" It is true, that, in respect of the degree in which these dispositions are required, there must be an infinite distance between what is due to God and to man: but if the smallest measure is due to man, much more is the greatest measure due to God: and if we are to obey man in *any* thing, much more ought we to obey God in *every* thing.

This is put in a very striking point of view in the chapter before us, where God brings forth the Rechabites, and their obedience to the commands of Jonadab their progenitor, to shame the Jews who were disobedient to his commands.

The Rechabites were originally Kenites, descended from Hobab the father-in-law of Moses[b]: and, because they had no inheritance in Israel, it is generally thought that they still continued aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. But we apprehend, that, at some period subsequent to the division of Canaan, they had embraced the Jewish faith; because Jehonadab, the very person spoken of in our text, was the person whom Jehu took up into his carriage, saying, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord:" and,

[a] Mal. i. 6. [b] 1 Chron. ii. 55.

and, had he not been reckoned amongst the true Israelites at that time, we conceive that Jehu, at the very moment that he was usurping the throne of Israel, would not have courted so publickly his alliance and support[c]: nor do we think that Jeremiah would have taken the Rechabites "into the house of the Lord," and "into the chamber of a man of God," if they had not been possessed of the full privileges of Israelites. The circumstance of their having no inheritance in Israel will sufficiently account for their being called "strangers" there, and for their wishing to avoid the jealousies and contentions which the acquisition of wealth might occasion. But however this might be, the complaint which was founded on their obedience is the same; and is deserving of very peculiar attention.

Let us consider this complaint,

I. Simply—

Jonadab had enjoined on his posterity not to build, or plant, or sow, or even to possess houses or vineyards; but to dwell in tents, and to drink no wine: and they had been observant of his injunctions now for the space of three hundred years. But on occasion of the Chaldean invasion, they had fled to Jerusalem for safety[d]: and the prophet Jeremiah set wine before them, and invited them to refresh themselves with it. This was done by God's command, not with a view to tempt and ensnare them, but for the purpose of displaying their adherence to the commands of their father, and of putting to shame the whole Jewish nation for their disobedience to the commands of God. At first sight, this appears to be an insulated fact, in which we have little concern; but there is in reality, at this day,

1. The same regard for the commands of men—

[It should seem as if a reverence for tradition were inherent, as it were, in our very nature; since we find it equally prevailing in every quarter of the world.

It is universally found in relation to *civil and political institutions*. However different the forms of government may be which

[c] 2 Kin. x. 15, 16. [d] ver. 6—11.

which obtain amongst the different nations of the world, there exists amongst the natives a partiality in favour of it, insomuch that they are ready to fight, and even to die, in its defence. Republics, and monarchies, whether limited or absolute, are on a par in this respect: whichever has been established, has on that account a great pre-eminence in the estimation of the people.

This zeal for what has been handed down from our forefathers obtains, if possible, yet more strongly in reference to *religious ordinances*. There are many of the same traditions, and the same fixed adherence to them too, amongst the different religious orders of the Papists at this day, as obtained formerly amongst the Rechabites. Rites, which God never enjoined, are venerated even beyond the plainest commandments of our God. In like manner, amongst us Protestants, every sect has its peculiar dogmas, which are adhered to from generation to generation, with a scrupulous and superstitious exactness. Notwithstanding it is manifest that there are pious men of every denomination, and that God may be served and honoured by one as well as by another, yet all are disposed to look with pity or contempt on each other, and to claim to themselves an exclusive conformity to the Divine will. Some, even in their dress and in their language, affect a singularity which they transmit to succeeding generations, and impose as distinctive badges of their community. And all these points of difference form, in the minds of each community, as great a barrier between them and others, as the self-denying habits of the Rechabites did between them and the House of Israel.]

2. The same disregard for the commands of God—

[To all of every denomination God says, as to his people of old, "Return ye now every man from his evil way:" but who regards him? Do drunkards, whoremongers, adulterers, and profane swearers, attend to his voice, or set themselves in earnest to amend their ways? Do the votaries of pleasure, or the people who are absorbed in the cares of this world, relax their pursuit of earthly things, and begin to set their affections on things above? Do those who rest in a mere formal round of duties without feeling any of the power of godliness, renounce their proud self-righteous conceits, and humble themselves before God as guilty and undone sinners? Do they receive with gratitude the glad tidings of salvation, and flee with becoming earnestness to the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope? Do not sinners of every class retain their habits as much as if they had never been called upon to renounce them? We ask of every individual, Have you turned from that particular way, in which, from inclination or habit, you have formerly been led; and have you truly, and penitently, and unreservedly, given up yourselves to God? We put this question to the decent and the moral, as well as to those who have

have given a freer scope to their corrupt appetites; Have the commands of God had any considerable influence on your minds? Have you truly studied them, with a view to find out your departures from them, and with a determination of mind to conform yourselves to them to the very utmost of your power? As for any partial change adopted with a view to advance your character or interest in the world, we inquire not about it: your change must be founded on the authority of God, and be commensurate with his commands, or it is of no value in his sight: the conversion must be from sin to holiness, from the world to God: nothing less than that is required by God: and in this view of our duty, we ask again, Has not God the same ground of complaint against us, as he had against his people of old, that however observant we may have been of the commands of men, we have not hearkened unto him?]

But let us consider the complaint more minutely,

II. With its attendant aggravations—

In our text, there is an evident contrast formed between the obedience of the Rechabites and the disobedience of the Jews. We notice more particularly,

1. The authority from which the different commands proceeded—

[That which the Rechabites obeyed was human: that which the Jews disobeyed was Divine. Yes: it is the God of heaven and earth, whom we also have set at nought. He created us for himself; yet have we considered ourselves as independent of him. He has preserved us every moment, yet have we lived in continued rebellion against him. He has redeemed us with the blood of his only dear Son; yet have we poured contempt on all the wonders of his love, as well as on the terrors of his offended Majesty. Let us only reflect on what we must all have observed, times without number: We tell a person, that such or such a line of conduct is contrary to God's revealed will; and we produce little, if any effect upon him: but if we tell him that such a conduct will destroy his prospects in the world, or expose him to shame and contempt among his fellow-creatures, we at least excite very strong emotions in his mind, even if we do not prevail to change his deportment. The truth is, we are all very sensibly alive to the displeasure of men, but lamentably indifferent to the displeasure of God; and man's authority weighs abundantly more with us than the authority of the Most High.]

2. The commands themselves—

[Whatever propriety there might be in the commands of Jonadab, they were certainly not *necessary* for the salvation of his

his descendants. But the commands of God are absolutely necessary, both to our present and eternal welfare. Which of them is there that can be dispensed with? Which of them is there that can be lowered or relaxed, without dishonour to God, and injury to man? Consider more particularly the commands relating to the Gospel: they are like commands to the blind, to see; to the deaf, to hear; to the lame, to walk; to the leprous, to be clean; to the dead, to arise and live for ever. Which of these commands would the person afflicted desire to dispense with? Oh! the horrible ingratitude of despising the Gospel of Christ! See, Brethren, what sad reason there is for God's complaint against us!]

3. The manner in which they were enforced—

[The one injunction of Jonadab, that had been given three hundred years before, was all that had operated on the minds of his descendants; even though it had been merely suggested as a matter of expediency, without being enforced by any sanctions whatever. But God's commands had been, and still are, renewed from day to day, by ambassadors sent for that express purpose, and authorized to assure us, that eternal happiness and eternal misery depend on the regard which we pay to them. What an amazing aggravation of our guilt is this! Verily, whatever excuses we may make for our conduct now, our mouths will be shut in the day of judgment; yea, and the whole house of the Rechabites will rise up in judgment against us and condemn us.]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who regard man, and not God—

[God himself rewarded the Rechabites for their adherence to the customs of their forefathers; and thereby expressed his approbation of an attention to rules, which have been derived from authority, and established by time. Whether the rules pertain to civil or religious duties, provided they do not militate against the law of God, or prove burthensome to the conscience, we conceive it is right to conform to them. But no punctuality in the observance of them can stand in the place of obedience to God. We may be zealous patriots, active partisans, strict religionists, and yet never render unto God any spiritual service, or take one step in our way to heaven. God must have the heart; Christ must be the one ground of our hope and confidence; the Holy Spirit must guide and sanctify our souls; or else we shall remain in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. Let those then, who are disposed to value themselves on their regularity and zeal in the observance of human ordinances, remember, that they are building on a foundation of sand; and that *they only* build upon a rock, who hear and do the commandments of their God[e].]

2. To

[e] Matt. vii. 24—27.

2. To those who regard God, and not man—

[Though none would go so far as to say that religion supersedes all human obligations, and justifies a contempt of all established usages, there are many who act as if this were the real sentiment of their hearts. At the commencement of the French Revolution, this observation was verified to no small extent in our own land: many who should have been "the quiet in the land" were as eager as any to subvert that Constitution, which has since approved itself the admiration and envy of the world. And it is still too often found, that persons professing a love for religion neglect the duties of their place and station, and violate the most established usages of the society to which they belong. But such persons little think what spirit they are of, or what injury they do to the souls of men. The people who know not God will of course lay the greatest stress upon the observance of their own peculiar laws and maxims; and will blame, not the conduct only that violates them, but religion itself, as countenancing that conduct. On this account, St. Paul was careful to "give no offence in any thing." He consulted the prejudices of men, and conformed to their views and habits as far as he conscientiously could, "becoming all things to all men, that he might by all means save some." This is the conduct which we all should imitate: this is the life by which we should adorn our holy profession: this is the way to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and to "win by our conversation" those who would never have been won by the written or preached word. Let the Apostle's exhortation then be the rule of our conduct; "Whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, and *of good report*, if there be any virtue, *if there be any praise*, think on these things."]

3. To those who feel an united regard for both—

[It is well indeed if you have learned to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." And we would wish every religious person to attain such a measure of consistency, as to be able to say both to the godly and ungodly, What have ye, which I have not? and, What do ye, which I do not? "Are ye Hebrews? so am I: are ye Israelites? so am I." This kind of consistency will in due time create an influence over the minds of many; and may recommend religion to generations yet unborn. We would not indeed wish any one to be burthening himself or others with superstitious observances; but to adopt the *spirit* of Jonadab's injunctions will be of incalculable advantage to us all. Self-denial and deadness to the world are amongst the most important duties of Christianity; and to live in the habitual exercise of these will be an effectual preservative from temptation. That we shall be tempted to violate our principles and our engagements, must be expected:

expected: both the world and the flesh will, as it were, "set pots of wine before us, and say, Drink ye wine." But, if we have learned to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, we shall have our answer ready at hand, 'My Father, and my God, has forbidden it; and I will do only the things that please him.' Thus bear in mind your vows and obligations to your God, and you shall "never be led away by the error of the wicked, nor fall from your own stedfastness."]

DLXXI.

JEHOIAKIM BURNS THE SACRED ROLL.

Jer. xxxvi. 27, 28. *Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, (after that the king had burnt the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah,) saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burnt.*

TRUTH has peculiar force, when it is embodied, and exhibited in action. A speculative view of it may perhaps be derived as well from abstract statements; but its practical efficacy is exceedingly enhanced by a sight of it in actual operation. For instance: the enmity of the carnal mind against God is acknowledged by us in general terms; but we are more forcibly impressed with a conviction of it, when we behold such a display of it as is contained in the chapter before us. We should scarcely conceive, that any man could deliberately commit such flagrant impiety, as that of which king Jehoiakim was guilty, in destroying those prophecies which he believed to have proceeded from Almighty God. It does not appear that Jehoiakim doubted of the inspiration of Jeremiah: yet, because he did not like the subject of his prophecies, he cut them in pieces, and burned them in the fire. His folly in this act was as great as his impiety: and we shall find it by no means an uninstructive event, whilst we take occasion from it to notice,

I. The enmity of man's heart against the word of God—

It is not the *act* which we propose to dwell upon, but

but the *disposition*: the *act* was insulated, and peculiar to this wicked king; but the *disposition* is common to all mankind. The very same disposition may be, and frequently is, evinced in a variety of ways:

1. By denying the Divine authority of the Scriptures—

[Infidels pretend a want of evidence, as the ground of their rejecting the holy Scriptures: but they wish the Scriptures not to be true, because they wish to hold fast those opinions and practices which the Scriptures condemn. Their own pride and conceit are gratified in finding objections to the Divine authority of the Bible: and they require such demonstrations of it as the subject itself does not admit of. They lay a very undue stress upon some difficulties which they cannot explain; and reject evidences, which would satisfy them on every other subject under heaven. The true ground therefore of their unbelief is, not that there is not evidence enough to satisfy a candid inquirer, but that "they love darkness rather than light; yea, they hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved[a]."]

2. By explaining away all its fundamental truths—

[To reject the Bible altogether would, in the eyes of some, be a shocking impiety; but they will without hesitation discard every mystery contained in it. The doctrine of original sin, and of the total corruption of human nature, they will not admit; but will assert, that man is neither so depraved nor so weak as the Scripture represents him. They are equally adverse to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith: they will have it, that, in bestowing salvation, God has respect to some goodness, either seen or foreseen, in the children of men; and that, in some degree at least, our good works must form the meritorious ground of our salvation. The influences of the Holy Spirit also are derided by them, as visionary and enthusiastic; and instead of looking to the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth, and to sanctify them throughout, they persist in placing some confidence in their own wisdom and their own strength to accomplish the good work in their souls. And their whole study of the holy Scriptures is directed to this end, to explain away what God has asserted, and to maintain their own errors in opposition to him. But in all this, there is the same disposition exercised as in the avowed infidel: and he must be ignorant indeed, who does not know, that in these pretended Believers of the Scriptures there is generally found the most acrimonious hostility against the truth itself, and against all who maintain it.]

3. By

[a] John iii. 19—21.

3. By entertaining doubts of its utility to the poor—

[Would to God that Papists alone had broached this impious sentiment! But, alas! it is found amongst Protestants also: nor are there wanting those who have given it as their decided opinion, that it would have been better for the world if St. Paul had never written one of his Epistles. To put the Scriptures into the hands of the poor, they think highly inexpedient; because they apprehend that the poor are more likely to be led into error by them, than into truth. But what a reflection is this upon God himself, who gave them by inspiration, and declared them to be "profitable for men's instruction in righteousness[b];" and commanded every man to "search" them, in order to the finding of eternal life[c]! To soften down this impious notion, some would select a few parts to circulate among the poor, and would keep back the rest: in other words, they would do exactly what Jehoiakim did; they would cut out page after page, and suffer none to be read which was distasteful to their minds. Jehoiakim was afraid that his people would make a bad use of Jeremiah's roll, and therefore he burned it: and these have the same fears about the greater part of the Sacred Volume, and therefore they would keep it out of the hands of the poor. The *acts* of the two are different; but their *dispositions* are the same.]

4. By setting its precepts at defiance—

[Strange as it may appear, there are many, who, whilst they believe the Scriptures to be from God, and assent to the doctrines contained in them, are yet determined to go on in sin: they know they are wrong, and perhaps intend at some future period to amend their doings; but proceed they will in their own ways, whatever may be the consequence. The world, the flesh, and the devil have such a hold upon them, that nothing can prevail upon them to seek after God. They despise alike the mercies and the judgments of their God; and say in their hearts, "As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not regard it." In short, they live in the very spirit of Jehoiakim; believing the word to be inspired, and yet "casting it behind them," with a determination to fulfil their own desires in opposition to it.]

5. By reviling and persecuting those who embrace it—

[There is nothing that shews a more rooted aversion to the word of God than this. The next step to the destroying of Jeremiah's roll was, to send for Jeremiah who dictated, and Baruch who wrote it, to destroy them also: for we cannot doubt but that if the Lord had not hidden them, the enraged monarch would have put them to death. And are not multitudes at this

[b] 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. [c] John v. 39.

this day of the very same spirit? Are there not many who hate the faithful Ministers of God's word, and account them "the troublers of Israel," and the greatest pests of society? Yes; at this day, as much as in the Apostolic age, would Paul and his colleagues be regarded as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things[d]."

Nor are Ministers alone thus treated: the same hatred extends to all who embrace the Gospel in sincerity, and walk according to its holy precepts: they, no less than their teachers, are called by all manner of opprobrious names, and *that* too solely on account of their fidelity to Christ. Precisely as Abel was hated by Cain for his piety, and Isaac was derided by Ishmael for his faith in God, "so now all who are born after the Spirit are persecuted by those who are born after the flesh[e]." And what does this prove, but that faith itself, and piety too, yea and God himself also, are objects of hatred to the ungodly world; and that the language of their hearts is, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits: and make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us[f]."]

That the same enmity which raged in the king of Judah against the word of God exists in us, appears most clearly in the foregoing particulars. We now proceed to point out,

II. The folly of indulging it—

Justly is the indulgence of this spirit compared to the setting of thorns and briers in battle array against the devouring element of fire[g]. For,

1. We cannot change one declaration in all the Scriptures—

[We may dispute against every truth in the Bible; but we cannot alter one. We may deny all the Scriptural representations of our guilt and helplessness, and of the necessity of being washed in the Redeemer's blood, and renewed by his Spirit; and we may designate them by what terms we will; but they will still continue true: our sophistry may deceive both ourselves and others; but it cannot invalidate the truth of God, or induce him to deviate from one word that he has spoken. He will say to us, "What I have written, I have written;" and "sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of my word shall fail." If by disputing against the word of God, or even by casting it into the fire, we could put ourselves into a better situation with respect to it, there would be some excuse for us: but we may as well immure ourselves in a dungeon, and deny the existence

[d] 1 Cor. iv. 13. [e] Gal. iv. 29. [f] Isai. xxx. 9—11.
[g] Isai. xxvii. 4.

existence of the sun: the sun would still shine, though we should not choose to see it; and would still cheer the hearts of those who felt its refreshing beams, though we excluded ourselves from any participation of its genial influence. So will all the great doctrines of the Gospel continue, though we should shut our eyes against them: "the Scripture cannot be broken;" nor "can our unbelief make the faith of God of no effect[h]." Every thing else is "as grass, which withereth and falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever: and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you[i]."]

2. We cannot prevent the execution of one threatening—

[We are very apt to deceive ourselves in relation to this; and to think, that our unbelief will be an excuse for our disobedience. But error is not innocent, especially when it is wilful: much less can it induce God to reverse all the judgments which he has denounced against sin and sinners. Let us look to fact. The Antediluvians scoffed at Noah, and at all his warnings respecting the approaching deluge: but did the deluge not come? or did they escape when the time for executing the threatened judgment was arrived? "Ahab hated and imprisoned Micaiah for not speaking good concerning him, but evil;" and ordered him to be fed "with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, till he should return from the war in peace." But did he return in peace? Did he survive the battle, in which Micaiah had told him he would die? Did his determined opposition to the word of God screen him from the predicted vengeance? Thus will it be with all who disbelieve the Sacred Records: they will learn too late by their own experience, what they would not believe upon the testimony of God: dying in unregeneracy and unbelief, they will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven, and "the wrath of God will abide upon them[k]." O the folly and madness of plunging ourselves into everlasting misery, when, if we would but turn unto the Lord, we might secure the everlasting enjoyment of his kingdom and glory!]

3. We accumulate on our own heads the judgments which we despise—

[The contempt with which men treat the word of God is itself a great and grievous sin, and adds exceedingly to that load of guilt which we have contracted by all our other offences. How indignant was God with Saul on this account! "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath rejected thee from being king[l]." In like manner, it was no slight expression of his displeasure which he used towards those who, in opposition to his commands, went down into Egypt; "They shall know," says

[h] Rom. iii. 3. [i] 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.
[k] John iii. 3, 36. [l] 1 Sam. xv. 23.

says he, "whose word shall stand, mine or theirs[m]." But more particularly mark God's message to king Jehoiakim: to what an ignominious death he was doomed for his impiety; besides that, on the contents of this roll being again written, "*there were added unto them many like words.*" Let it be considered, that, whilst we are setting at nought the word of God, we are not only insuring, but increasing, those very "judgments which we puff at," and actually "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." Well does God say of all such persons, "Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them[n]?" Let these words then sink down into the ears of all that hear them: if ye persist in saying, "I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of my heart; the Lord's anger will smoke against you, and blot out your name from under heaven[o]."]

If now we would know how to conduct ourselves in reference to the word of God, let us LEARN,

1. To tremble at the word ourselves—

[This is the disposition which God approves. He approved of it in king Josiah, under circumstances similar to those in the history before us[p]; and he will look with complacency and delight on all who manifest it in their conduct[q]. O that there might be in all of us such a heart! for if we "receive the word with meekness, we shall find it able and effectual to save our souls."]

2. To use all diligence in making it known to others—

[When Baruch had written the words from Jeremiah's mouth, he went and read them in the ears of all the people. Then he read them also in the presence of the princes: and the princes went and read them to the king. All this was right: and we should do well to imitate this conduct. To those who possess not the word of God, we should carry it: and as now there are plans for diffusing that word throughout all the world, we should labour, each according to his ability, to advance that blessed work. Moreover we should read it to those who are not able to read; or, at least, should procure them instruction, that they may read it for themselves. Nor should we be afraid to shew our veneration for it in the presence of kings and princes, or to suggest to them the necessity of attending to it themselves.]

3. To deal faithfully with those who pour contempt upon it—

[It is spoken to the reproach of these princes, that though they made intercession to the king not to burn the roll, they did not rend their clothes, either through a fear of God's judgments, or

[m] Jer. xliv. 28. [n] Jer. viii. 9. [o] Deut. xxix. 19—22.
[p] 2 Kin. xxii. 8, 10, 11, 18, 19, 20. [q] Isai. lxvi. 2.

or through an abhorrence of his impiety. And truly, when we can see the contempt with which the holy Scriptures are treated by all around us, and not weep for the dishonour done to God, or for the injury which men do to their own souls, we shew that we ourselves are far from valuing the Scriptures as we ought. "Rivers of tears ran down David's cheeks," when he observed how men transgressed the laws of God: and is there not the same occasion for us to weep? Do we believe indeed that every word of God is true, and feel no pity for those who are exposed to all the curses that are contained therein? O seek a compassionate regard for man, and a holy zeal for God! and let none ever be ashamed to attest this truth, that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding[r]."]

[r] Job xxviii. 28.

DLXXII.

DISSIMULATION REPROVED.

Jer. xlii. 20, 21. *Ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God; and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it. And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you.*

THE office of a Minister, if it abound with consolations, abounds with trials and afflictions also. When he is instrumental to the turning of men to righteousness, and "sees his children walk in truth, he has the sublimest joy" of which, in his present state of existence, he is capable: but to find that he only "labours in vain," and to behold those of whom he had begun to entertain some pleasing hopes, making shipwreck of their faith and of a good conscience, is inexpressibly painful: such scenes as these renewed, as it were, in the Apostle's mind, all the pangs of childbirth, so that "he travailed in birth again with his converts, till Christ should be completely formed in them." The prophet Jeremiah was very unfortunate in this respect: he had at all times to deal with an untoward people; and actually experienced more kindness

kindness from the enemies of his nation, than he did from the people unto whom he ministered.

The particular circumstances under which he was at the time referred to in our text, deserve to be considered. Johanan and the captains of the Jewish forces having rescued their countrymen from Ishmael, who was carrying them captive into the land of the Ammonites, were doubting whether to continue in Canaan, where they feared the vengeance of the Chaldeans, or to go into the land of Egypt, where they hoped to find both safety and abundance. In this strait they applied for instruction to Jeremiah, with apparent sincerity, but (as our text informs us, and the event proved,) with real dissimulation. We propose to consider their conduct,

I. As exemplified in them—

Their dissimulation was indeed most vile and flagrant—

[*In their application to the prophet, there was the greatest expression of piety:* they intreated his prayers to God for them, and promised to follow implicitly whatever direction he should give them from the Lord. They declared most solemnly, that no consideration of ease or interest should induce them to deviate from his injunctions; and they even called God himself to be a witness between the prophet and them, and to visit upon them their iniquity, if they should neglect to perform their promise[a] ———

By the prophet, God returned to them a most gracious answer. He directed them what to do; and encouraged them by the strongest assurances of his own protection; promising to return in mercy to them himself, as well as to dispose the heart of the king of Babylon to shew mercy to them: at the same time he warned them plainly, that if they would follow their own ways in opposition to his counsel, he would bring upon them all the calamities which they were so anxious to escape[b] ———

They however, by their determined rejection of God's counsel, betrayed in the most open manner their own hypocrisy. Instead of hearkening to God's voice, they, "the proud among them" especially, denied that the message which was delivered to them proceeded from God: they imputed it to the ill-will of Baruch towards them[c]; and told the prophet plainly, that they would not follow his injunctions[d]. Accordingly they, in express violation of

[a] Read ver. 1—6. [b] Read ver. 7—19.
[c] Ch. xliii. 1—3. [d] Ch. xliv. 16.

of their own engagements, went down into Egypt, and there found, as God had declared unto them, "whose word should stand, his or theirs[e]."]

From this view of the history, we are led to make the following remarks:

First, How little do men know of their own hearts!

[In all the professions which they made of their readiness and determination to obey their God, they thought themselves sincere; and doubtless would have been exceedingly indignant, if the prophet had in the first instance charged them with hypocrisy. Thus Peter, when he so vehemently declared, that, though all others should forsake their Lord, he never would, conceived that nothing could ever induce him to recede from his purpose: and thus we also persuade ourselves that we shall prove superior to all temptations, till the time of trial comes, and we shew by our unfaithfulness how little we knew of our own hearts.]

Next, What an enemy to man's happiness is pride!

[It was "the proud men" in particular who denied the inspiration of the prophet, and who ascribed his message to a conspiracy which he and Baruch had entered into to deceive them. To the same malignant principle of pride does the holy Psalmist impute the contempt with which ungodly men treat every thing that relates to God: "The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God[f]." Yes, this is at the root of infidelity: men pretend that there is a want of evidence of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, and exclaim against the Gospel as the invention of priestcraft or enthusiasm: but the truth is, they are too proud to submit to the yoke of Christ, and to receive salvation as the unmerited gift of God.]

Once more;—How awful is the issue of unbelief!

[Plain were the warnings which they received; and bitter was the experience which the unbelieving Jews had of God's fidelity to his threatenings. Thus also it was with the Jews who came out of Egypt, every one of whom perished in the wilderness, with the exception of two only. And thus it shall be with Unbelievers, whoever they may be: they shall find to their cost, "Whose word shall stand, whether God's or theirs." "Their unbelief shall never make the word of God of none effect:" of his word, not one jot or tittle shall ever fall to the ground.]

From this general view of their conduct, let us turn to the consideration of it,

II. As imitated by us—

It may properly be said of all who attend upon the preaching

[e] Ch. xliv. 28. [f] Ps. x. 4.

preaching of the Gospel, that they virtually acknowledge the relation that subsists between them and their Minister: they look to him as God's ambassador, to declare to them the Divine will respecting them; and they profess their readiness to obey the Divine mandates, whatsoever they may be: and in every instance wherein they are wilfully disobedient, they are, in truth, like the Jews in our text, dissemblers with God. But there are some particular occasions on which our hearers place themselves precisely, as it were, in the same situation with them whose conduct we are considering:

1. Under conviction of sin—

[Those who hear the Gospel faithfully administered, rarely escape without having the word at one time or other brought home to their conscience, and being constrained to make some resolutions of amendment. When such emotions are excited, the heart, which was before stout, is softened; and the ear, which was deaf to all the precepts of the Gospel, becomes opened to receive instruction. On such occasions men will even condescend to request a remembrance in the prayers of their Ministers, and to desire instruction relative to the commands of God. Like those on the day of Pentecost, they will cry, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?"

For persons in such a state the faithful Minister feels deeply interested: and, whilst he implores the blessing of God upon them, he points out to them the only way of life and salvation. He shews them, that, "if they will be Christ's disciples, they must deny themselves" in reference to all their former lusts and evil habits; that they must "take up their cross daily;" and not only bear with patience the contempt and hatred of an ungodly world, but rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer for their Redeemer's sake; and that they must "follow Christ" in the whole of his spirit and conduct, "walking in all things as he walked."

But this, to the generality, appears too strait a path: they reply, as our Saviour's hearers did, "This is an hard saying; Who can hear it?" and like them also, "they go back, and walk no more with us:" thus proving, by their inconstancy, that all their former professions were no better than dissimulation before God. O let those who have "tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," examine their own hearts, and see in what light they are viewed by God, if they have not followed up their convictions, and devoted themselves truly to their Lord and Saviour!]

2. Under

2. Under some heavy trial or affliction—

[Affliction has a tendency to plow up, as it were, the fallow-ground of man's heart, and to prepare it for the reception of the good seed. The loss of a wife, or husband, or child, or of some friend that was as one's own soul, is often the means of embittering to us all that this world can afford, and of directing our attention to a better world, where alone true happiness can be found. A succession of any other painful events will also produce a similar effect.

Religious company and conversation will, under such circumstances, be not only tolerated, but often desired and delighted in; and the most hopeful appearances of sound conversion will ensue. "They will pour out a prayer, when God's chastening is upon them;" yea, says God, "In their affliction they will seek me early."

But in most cases the impression is but of short duration; and the vows which they made in trouble are soon forgotten. They are like metal taken out of the furnace, which soon returns to its former hardness. Thus it was with the Jews: "When God slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God, &c.; nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, &c.; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant[g]." And thus it is with too many also amongst ourselves; "their goodness is only as the morning dew, and as the early cloud that passeth away."]

3. At the approach of death—

[The most hardened of men are, for the most part, softened at the prospect of death; so that even the most abandoned criminals, under a sentence of condemnation, are thankful for the services of a pious Minister, listening eagerly to his instructions, and uniting fervently with him in his prayers. Indeed the common practice of mankind has sanctioned the idea of sending for a Minister, to counsel and to pray for the sick and dying.

On those occasions we hear much regret expressed by the generality, on account of the sad neglect of which they have been guilty; and many purposes formed of turning unto the Lord, in case their lives should be prolonged.

But, when such persons are unexpectedly restored to health, how rarely do we find that they fulfil their promises, and devote themselves to God according to their vows! Truly, we need not look to the Jews for examples of dissimulation; for there is not a family, or scarcely an individual, that does not furnish an instance of it amongst ourselves. Human nature is the same in all ages: and wherever pride and unbelief reign, there will be disobedience, obduracy, and ruin.]

Let

[g] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

Let me now ADDRESS,

1. The disobedient amongst you—

[Consider the relation that subsists between us. As your Minister, it is my duty to pray for you, and to declare to you with fidelity the whole counsel of God. Suffer me to ask, How you have improved the opportunities you have enjoyed? If some few have answered the gracious designs of God respecting them, have not the great mass continued in their sinful habits even to this hour, instead of turning truly and unreservedly to the Lord their God? What then have their whole lives been, but one continued course of dissimulation with God? And what must the issue be of such conduct? Oh, before it is too late, remember how often you have been admonished "not to lean to your own understandings," nor to "trust in an arm of flesh;" but to obey implicitly God's revealed will, and to cleave unto the Saviour with full purpose of heart! The Lord grant that now at last you may become obedient to the faith; and that, instead of being a swift witness against you, I may have you as my joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of judgment!]

2. Those who are hesitating what course to pursue—

[Do not "consult with flesh and blood," but go to the Lord your God, who, if you are upright in your requests, will surely make known his will unto you. The counsel of God's Ministers may indeed be asked; but they must no further be followed than they speak agreeably to the written word. That word you are to consult, every one of you for himself; and, if you pray unto God for his Spirit, "he will guide you into all truth." But beware of dissimulation: beware also of delay. Defer not unto the morrow what God requires to be done to-day: but "to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness." If you listen to pride and unbelief, you see in the history before us, whither they will lead you. The ungodly world may promise you safety in following their ways; but safety is to be found only in an unreserved obedience to the commands of God, and especially that command of living by faith in his dear Son, and devoting yourselves to him as his redeemed people. "Believe then in the Lord, so shall ye prosper; believe his Prophets, so shall ye be established."]

DLXXIII.

THE MEANS OF TERMINATING WAR.

Jer. xlvii. 6, 7. *O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard; rest, and*

and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea-shore? there hath he appointed it.

THOUGH the two nations of Judah and Israel were the primary objects of attention to the Prophets, yet many other nations were referred to in their prophecies; and the most important events respecting them were circumstantially foretold. The chapter before us relates to the Philistines: and it was written at a time when they had recovered the power, of which David had deprived them. It foretells the invasion of their land by the Chaldeans, together with the long continuance of the conflict, which should end in the subjugation of them and their allies.

We shall not confine our attention to them, but take the text as expressing generally,

I. The evils of protracted war—

War is a tremendous evil—

[It is so even in its commencement: the distress of the Philistines at the approach of the invading army is very strongly depicted[a]: and doubtless the representation is suited to any other country that is similarly circumstanced——— What then must be the miseries attendant on a protracted warfare! the desolations must spread far and wide; the slaughters be multiplied; famines be produced; perhaps pestilence also be generated. But who can enumerate the miseries which war brings in its train?———]

Well might the prophet desire its speedy termination—

[Humanity alone, independent of patriotic feelings or private interests, would make one desire to see the sword restored to its scabbard. Some who fatten on the spoils of war, or whose ambition is insatiable, may wish to have these fatal contests protracted; but every one who regards either the temporal or spiritual welfare of mankind, will ardently wish for the termination of them. The days described by the prophet will be desired, infinitely beyond any national aggrandisement, or personal advancement[b].]

Whilst

[a] "The men cry and howl:" and the fathers are so terrified and enfeebled, as either to forget their own children, or to be afraid to look back for them. ver. 2, 3.

[b] Isai xi. 6—9.

Whilst all acknowledge the evils of war, few seem to be aware of,

II. The reason of its continuance—

War is one of those judgments with which God punishes the sins of men—

[We are apt to look only to second causes, instead of acknowledging, as we ought, *the first Great Cause*. Doubtless the passions of men are the immediate sources from whence the calamities of war arise: and men are strictly amenable, both to God and their fellow-creatures, for the evils, which, by their undue exercise of those passions, they inflict upon the world: but God, who accomplishes his own purposes without at all infringing on the liberty of the human will, renders those passions subservient to his own designs; and employs men as his agents, as a man employs an axe in the execution of any work which he chooses to effect[c]. Man is the instrument; but God is the real author of the work that is done[d].]

Till he has effected his own purposes by it, no human efforts can bring it to a close—

[What are his ultimate designs, is known to himself alone: but whatever "his counsel be, it shall stand; and he will do all his will." He had "given the sword a charge against Ashkelon and the sea-shore; and therefore it *could not* be quiet," till it had executed its commission. He puts a cup into the hand of different nations; and it must go round, till they have all drunk of it. In vain will any refuse it: taste they must, yea and drink too, even to the dregs, if God has so decreed[e]. And, as we ourselves have been his instruments, to carry war to coasts which were, according to human appearances, most secure; so may we have it brought to our own shores, notwithstanding the security we appear to enjoy; and, if "God has so appointed," no power or policy of men will be able to avert the storm: we have partaken largely of the sins of other nations; and we must expect to partake also of their punishments[f].]

But what is impossible with man, is possible with God; who has mercifully declared to us,

III. The means of its termination—

The intention of God's chastisements is to bring us to repentance—

[God has no pleasure in correcting the children of men: on the contrary, "judgment is his strange act," to which with reluctance and difficulty he proceeds. But he tells us plainly, that

[c] Jer. li. 20—23.
[d] Isai. x. 14, 15.
[e] Jer. xxv. 15, 16, 17, 27, 28.
[f] Ezek. 23. 31—35.

that he will proceed, till he has accomplished his gracious ends; yea that, if we hold fast our iniquities, he will increase his chastisements seven-fold[g]. On the contrary, he promises, that if we humble ourselves before him, he will remove them[h]. When his rod does not produce the desired effect, he complains of us[i], and expresses the deepest regret that we have not suffered him to exercise the mercy which was in his heart towards us[k]. In a word, his message to the whole world is this, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin[l]."]

On the attainment of his end, he will instantly remove his judgments from us—

[What an example is given us, in his mercy towards the inhabitants of Nineveh! How did he regard even the humiliation of Ahab, though he knew it to be only external, selfish, and partial[m]! This then is the way to terminate the calamities of war. Sin is, as it were, the target, at which God shoots his arrows. The sword is drawn, "to avenge the quarrel of his covenant:" let that quarrel be composed, and "the sword will be returned to its scabbard; it will rest, and be still."]

Having considered the means of terminating the calamities of war, and of averting the judgments of God from our land, we would, in CONCLUSION, suggest some hints respecting those heavy judgments, which God has denounced against sinners in another world, and respecting the best means of averting them from our souls.

[That the sword has a charge against impenitent sinners, is certain[n]———nor, however secure they may think themselves, shall they be able to escape it[o]———"Except they repent, they must all inevitably perish[p]." Moreover, if it be once drawn out against a person in the eternal world, it shall never be returned to its scabbard. Think then whether it have not received a charge against *you*. It is true, you are not mentioned by *name*; but you may be as clearly marked by *character*, as if your very name were specified. Possibly enough your works are such as to determine your state, beyond any possibility of doubt[q]: or, if not, your want of regeneration and conversion may no less clearly mark you as monuments of God's displeasure[r]———Know then, that in Christ only can you obtain pardon and peace: "There is no other name given, whereby you can be saved." Seek then

[g] Lev. xxvi. 27, 28. [h] Ib. ver. 40—42. [i] Zech. vii. 11, 12.
[k] Ps. lxxxi. 13—16. [l] Ezek. xviii. 30. [m] 1 Kin. xxi. 29.
[n] Ps. vii. 11—13. & ix. 17. & xi. 6. [o] Prov. xi. 21.
[p] Luke xiii. 3, 5. [q] Gal. v. 19—21. [r] John iii. 3, 5.

then "to be found in him:" and know for your comfort, "if your life be hid with Christ in God," it will be out of the reach of God's avenging sword; and "when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory."]

DLXXIV.

DUTY OF ACKNOWLEDGING GOD'S MERCIES.

Jer. li. 10. *Come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God!*

THE Prophets, whilst foretelling future events, are often transported in Spirit to the period of which they speak; and are enabled to see, as it were, the events themselves actually passing before their eyes. Hence, if they speak of the rise or fall of kingdoms, they behold the armies marching to their destination, engaging in the conflict, and either conquering or conquered, according as the Governor of the Universe has fore-ordained. This is peculiarly manifest in relation to the destruction of Babylon; which is more frequently and more fully predicted than any other event, except those which immediately relate to God's chosen people[a]. It is of that event that the prophet speaks in the chapter before us, as he has also done in the preceding chapter. Having said in the foregoing verses that God would "send fanners to Babylon, to fan," to destroy her, though the event was not to take place for sixty years, yet he says, "This is the time of the Lord's recompence;" and then exclaims, "Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed! howl ye for her." He then speaks of the deliverance of the Jews from their captivity as already effected, and calls on them to declare in Zion the wonders which God had wrought for them: "The Lord hath brought forth our righteousness (that is, our *deliverance*): come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God."

It is not of future events that we are now called to

[a] See 13th & 14th Chapters of *Isaiah* throughout, and especially Ch. xiv. ver. 4—12.

to speak, but of things accomplished, as it were, before our eyes, and of things that demand our most grateful acknowledgment.

Let us consider,

I. What is that work which we are now called to declare—

At no period of our history had we ever more reason to bless and adore our God than at this day[b]. The mercies vouchsafed to us have been exceeding great and numerous. We cannot enter into them indeed very fully; but we will suggest some distinct heads, under which they may be arranged for your own more easy and profitable contemplation of them. Consider them then as *agricultural* and *commercial*, *political* and *religious*. Consider,

1. The agricultural—

[Heavy was the pressure on all the lower orders of society, by reason of the dearness of provisions, throughout the last year: and, if the late harvest had been as unproductive as that which preceded it, their distress would have been at this hour exceeding great. But God in his mercy vouchsafed to us a very abundant harvest, so that now all may "eat and be satisfied, and bless the name of their God." True it is, that other things still continue at a high price: but that very circumstance only shews us the more forcibly, how rich a mercy it is to have plenty of that which is "the staff of life." In enumerating then the mercies for which we have now peculiar reason to be thankful, let us not be unmindful of that in which the great mass of the community are so deeply interested, and which is perhaps the first of all national blessings.]

2. Commercial—

[To abridge and to destroy our commerce has been the incessant labour of our enemies: and to such a state was it reduced, that it could scarcely be carried on to any extent, without involving all the persons engaged in it in the guilt of perjury. The whole Continent almost was closed against us: and whatever was surreptitiously introduced there, was subjected to such peril, as to prove a most serious discouragement to all commercial enterprize. But now, within these few weeks only, the whole Continent is anxious to receive our goods: our manufactures are revived; our people, who during the last year were almost in a state of insurrection on account of the want of work, are employed; and a good

[b] This was preached on Jan. 13th, 1813.

good prospect is opened to us of increased and permanent prosperity. This, whether viewed in its aspect on individuals or the nation at large, is another blessing, which ought on no account to be overlooked.]

3. Political—

[Who that looks back to the earlier period of the French Revolution, and recollects what sentiments of insubordination and sedition pervaded the land, must not be surprised at the change that has taken place in relation to those things? Formerly the cry of liberty and equality was raised in almost every place, to instigate the people to throw off all submission to the Government: and such was the delusion by which the minds of many were blinded, that thousands were panting to destroy the Constitution, and to establish a democracy in its place. The same bloody scenes as took place in France were preparing for this land also; and so great and general was the infatuation, that many, even of religious characters, were ready to help forward the designs and efforts of those who sought our ruin. But now the excellence of our Constitution is duly appreciated; the persons who were once ready to subvert it have now seen their error; and perhaps there is scarcely a man in the land who would not willingly die in its defence. Nor is this change peculiar to us: it is now seen in every part of Europe; and those very people who banished their former Rulers, and overturned all their former establishments, are now desirous of returning to the state they have forsaken, and are actually fighting for the restoration of their former Governments. Thus has order taken the place of anarchy, and respect for constituted authorities banished from amongst us the demon of discontent.]

4. Religious—

[With a contempt for all ancient Institutions, there went forth an utter disregard of Revealed Religion. Infidelity stalked abroad, as it were, at noon-day. It no longer blushed to shew its face, but obtruded itself upon the attention of all; and reviled, as enemies to sense and reason, all who dared to maintain the cause of God in the world. Philosophy forsooth was deemed a safer guide than the voice of Inspiration; and the word of God itself was held up to ridicule, as a composition of falsehood and absurdity. How different is the state of things amongst us at this time! The Holy Scriptures are revered and honoured to a degree altogether unprecedented and unknown in this country. All ranks and orders of men amongst us not only receive the Sacred Volume as true, but stand forth to advocate its cause, and to extend the knowledge of it to every quarter of the globe. If we judged from the zeal exerted for the diffusion of the holy Scriptures, we should be ready to think that the Millennial period were already come. But, though we cannot yet congratulate ourselves

ourselves on such an extensive change as this, we nevertheless behold a most astonishing increase of true religion in the land. We are happy too to declare, that a similar spirit is rising in other lands; and that, "whilst God's judgments have been poured out so awfully and so extensively upon the earth, the inhabitants thereof have been learning righteousness[c]."

These then are mercies which may well "be declared in Zion," and which we are now called in a more especial manner to commemorate.]

Having drawn your attention to some of those mercies which deserve especial notice at this time, I proceed to shew,

II. In what manner we should declare them—

Since these mercies are so great and numerous, let us all unite in improving them as we ought to do:

1. Let us acknowledge God in them—

[Who is it that "hath wrought all these deliverances for us?" Is it our own hand, our own arm, that hath effected them? Who is it that gave us such a rich abundant harvest? We must be blind indeed, if we see not the hand of God in it[d]——— Who is it that hath opened all the ports of the Continent to our manufactures? Backward as men are to trace the operation of God in such things, there is scarcely a person in the land that does not say, "This is thine hand; and thou, Lord, hast done it[e]!" And must we not trace the revolution of sentiment to the same source? Who but God can "still the madness of the people?" It is he, and he alone, that "turneth the heart, whether of princes or of people, whithersoever he will[f]." Above all, to whose agency must we refer that great work of dispelling the clouds of infidelity, and of making his light to shine into the hearts of men? Truly, none but He "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness" at the first creation of the world, is sufficient for these things[g]. In reference then to every thing that has been done for us, we must say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the praise!"]

2. We must adore him for them—

[It is not a cold and speculative acknowledgment only that we are called to make: our hearts should be warmed with a sense of God's mercies: and our lips be devoutly occupied in his praise. The first effect indeed which they should have upon our minds is, to fill us with wonder and admiration of the Divine good-

[c] Isai. xxvi. 9.
[d] Hos. ii. 8. Ps. lxv. 9—13.
[e] Ps. cix. 27. & xliv. 3. Isai. xlv. 7.
[f] Prov. xxi. 1. Ps. lxv. 7.
[g] 2 Cor. iv. 6. & v. 5.

goodness[h]: but when we have, as it were, recovered from the overwhelming sense of his goodness, then should we declare it, and publish it with all the powers of our souls. Look at David, when recounting the mercies God had vouchsafed to Israel[i]: such is the language which well befits us on the present occasion; yea, we should "make our boast in God all the day long, and praise his name for ever and ever[k]." In this way "we must declare his work, if we would wisely consider of his doing[l]."]

3. Let us, by anticipation, bless God for the yet richer mercies which he has in reserve for us—

[We began with observing, that "the deliverance" from Babylon was yet distant, at least sixty years, though the prophet spoke of it as already accomplished. So may we look forward to the blessings which are made over to us by the sure word of promise, and may even now bless God for them as though they were already possessed. As Abraham rejoiced at the prospect of the day of Christ, just as if he had actually seen it with his eyes, so *may* we do, and so we *ought* to do, in reference to his future advent to reign on earth. Then will peace and plenty, and truth and righteousness, prevail throughout the world. Then shall men "beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, and they will learn war no more." Then "Judah will no more vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah," but all "sit harmonious and contented under their own vine and fig-tree." "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid:" nor shall any hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain. Then, whilst plenty abounds in every place[m], "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea." O what a day of wonders will that be! It is our privilege to look forward to it, and even to see it now, as it were, before our eyes. See how the prophet, who lived almost three thousand years ago, beheld it, and gloried in the sight[n]! and shall not we, who are almost on the very eve of that day? We have no doubt but that all these events, which have been taking place in the world these twenty years, are preparing the way for the promised advent of our Lord. Let us then anticipate it with joy and gratitude[o]: let us adore our God for giving such prospects to sinful man: and let us endeavour to hasten it forward by every possible exertion in the cause of Christ.]

[h] Ps. xl. 5. [i] Ps. xcviii. 1—8. [k] Ps. xliv. 7, 8. [l] Ps. lxiv. 9.
[m] Am. ix. 13—15. [n] Isai. xlix. 12, 13. & lx. 1, 4, 8.
[o] Isai. lii. 9, 10.

DLXXV.

THE BENEFIT OF EARLY AFFLICTIONS.

Lam. iii. 27—29. *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope.*

THERE are in the holy Scriptures many passages which appear strange and paradoxical, but which do indeed contain the most important truths. "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting," says Solomon: and again, "Sorrow is better than laughter[a]." These, taken in conjunction with our text, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," are as much opposed to the general sense of mankind, as any assertions can be: yet, the more they are considered, the more just and important will they be found. The truth is, that men judge of things only by their reference to time; but God's estimate is formed with a more immediate reference to eternity. If we consider only the operation of natural causes, we may see that the declaration in our text is just: for it is a common proverb, that 'practice makes easy;' and the earlier we are initiated into any art or science, the greater progress in it may be expected: but trials are indispensably necessary for the exercise of many of the Christian virtues: faith is called forth by difficulties; meekness and patience by provocations; forgiveness by injuries: so that a growth in these graces may be considered as materially advanced by early and long-continued occasions for their exercise. But, such is the corruption of our nature, that we need trials to purge it away: it is by fire that even good men must be refined from their dross: and, if we are called to experience afflictions in early life, we may hope our improvement will be proportionably great. In confirmation of this sentiment, we propose to shew *the benefit of early afflictions,*

I. In a general point of view—

David,

[a] Eccl. vii. 2, 3.

David, who had had a long and early experience of troubles, confessed "it was good for him that he had been afflicted[b]." And beyond a doubt, much benefit may be reaped,

1. From temporal afflictions—

[The loss of health, of friends, of property, are heavy afflictions——— yet, if duly improved, they may become real blessings to the soul. Illness in early life, though in many respects to be lamented and deprecated, tends exceedingly to counteract the vanity of the youthful mind, and the ardour of youthful passions. It renders a person sober, thoughtful, temperate, and willing to listen to subjects of a more serious cast; and keeps him from innumerable snares and difficulties, to which a buoyant spirit and a vigorous constitution would have exposed him.

Bereavements also (whether of friends or property), and disappointments in life, give us an early taste of the emptiness of the world, and the vanity of all created enjoyments. They have a tendency to direct the mind to higher pursuits, and to make us seek satisfaction, where alone it can be found, in the knowledge, the service, and the enjoyment, of God. The more we are made to feel that the creature is only a broken cistern, the more shall we be disposed to seek our consolation in the fountain of living waters.]

2. From spiritual afflictions—

[These are far heavier than any which mere temporal things can ever produce. "A man may sustain any trial respecting earthly things; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Yet are the groans and mournings of a deserted soul far preferable to the mirth and gaiety of a thoughtless sinner. A fear of God's wrath, though so distressing to the soul, has indeed a kindly influence upon us. How does it embitter to us the remembrance of former sins! How does it dispose us to desire true repentance, and to long for an interest in the Saviour! What a different aspect does the Sacred Volume bear under such a state of mind! and how tremendous its threatenings; how glorious its promises! how happy they to whom those promises are made! In a word, an apprehension of God's wrath assimilates the mind thus far to the mind of God himself; since it invariably inspires this thought, "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord!"]

3. From afflictions for righteousness' sake—

[These are often very deeply felt. A person who has embraced the Gospel feels in himself a change that should rather recommend him to the favour of the world: his tempers, his dispositions,

[b] Ps. cxix. 71.

positions, his habits, his conduct, are all greatly improved; and yet he finds, that he is become an object of dislike, perhaps too of indignation and abhorrence. This is painful to the young disciple: when he begins to love his fellow-creatures, then he himself begins to be hated by them. His former habits, if ever so licentious, exposed him to a little blame perhaps, but not to hatred: but his love to the Gospel exposes him to all manner of hatred and contempt. This, I say, is painful; but yet it is very beneficial to his soul. He would be ready, like Lot, to linger in Sodom; but these persecutions tend to drive him out. They serve in a very peculiar manner to confirm in his mind the principles of the Gospel; because he is taught in that very Gospel to expect the treatment which he has received, and to bear his cross after Christ. He finds too in the Gospel, that to suffer for righteousness' sake is a matter for self-congratulation; that he is to "rejoice in it, and leap for joy;" to account it the highest honour; and to expect from it the richest reward. Thus a new set of feelings are brought into his soul; a set of feelings as far superior to any that he ever before experienced, as the most refined sensations of the soul are above the lowest appetites of a beast.]

But we will proceed to notice this subject,

II. In that particular view which is specified in the text—

There are two things in particular to which our attention is called, and which are of the greatest possible advantage to the soul;

1. Seclusion from the world—

[When there is nothing to oppress the mind, we are apt to be off our guard, and to degenerate into a dead and worldly frame. We too easily mix with worldly company, and are thereby led to adopt their sentiments, and to drink into their spirit. But when trouble comes upon us, we lose our relish for society: we affect retirement rather, that we may muse over the subjects of our grief; or, as our text expresses it, "We sit alone, and keep silence[bb]." Oh, who can estimate the benefits arising from this source? By communing with our own hearts in their secret chamber, we attain a knowledge, which is not to be gained either from men or books,—the knowledge of our own hearts. In these seasons too we gain such views of God, of his goodness, his mercy, his power, his grace, as are acquired only in the school of affliction. It is on these occasions also that the Lord Jesus Christ particularly endears himself to our souls, and communicates to us the abundance of his grace. In persons thus instructed there is for the most part a maturity of wisdom and of spiritual

[bb] Jer. xv. 17.

spiritual understanding that is rarely found amongst those who have never experienced the discipline of adversity. In comparison of others, they manifest the beauty and sweetness of religion in a high degree; excelling others as much as the experienced mariner does the man who has never combated a storm.]

2. Submission to God—

[" Tribulation worketh patience, experience, and hope." By directing the thoughts inwards, it leads us to see, what abundant occasion there is within us for Divine chastisements, and how much more lenient they are than we deserve; and they dispose us to say, " I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him[c]." At first, perhaps, Nature revolts, and is impatient; but after a season, when we have " listened to the rod, and to Him that has appointed it," we become desirous only that it may drive out the folly that is bound up in our hearts. Then " we put our mouths in the dust," as penitents that are " dumb before God;" and we wait God's time, " if so be there may be hope," that his purpose may be ultimately accomplished, and the trials be sanctified to our eternal good. What a blessed state is this! like Aaron, " to hold our peace;" like Eli, to say, Let him do what seemeth him good; like Job, to bless the Lord; and, like David, to say, " Thou in very faithfulness hast afflicted me!" Surely to learn such lessons as these in early life is most desirable: and, if they cannot be learned without affliction, there is no affliction so severe, but that it will be richly recompensed by such an attainment.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have experienced no particular affliction—

[Whilst, on account of God's forbearance towards you, you have reason to be thankful, you have great reason also to fear: for, " if we are without chastisement, we are bastards, and not sons." At all events, there is much danger lest you become sad witnesses of that truth, " The prosperity of fools destroys them." Be watchful against the vanity of your deceitful hearts, and beg of God to augment towards you the communications of his grace in proportion to your peculiar necessities.]

2. Those who are called to bear the yoke—

[Remember that your trials are the fruit of God's love to your souls: for " whom he *loveth*, he chasteneth:" and, instead of thinking your lot hard, learn to " glory in your tribulations," and to " take pleasure in your distresses[d]." It was not an ignorant

[c] Mic. vii. 9.

[d] Rom. v. 3. 2 Cor. xii. 10.

ignorant or enthusiastic man that said, "We count *them* happy that endure;" and who from that conviction exhorts us, "My Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations[e]." Only take eternity into the account, and all your trials will appear light and momentary in the view of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which they are working out for you[f].]

[e] Ps. xciv. 12. with Jam. i. 2, 12. & v. 11. [f] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

DLXXVI.

COMMISSION GIVEN TO MINISTERS.

Ezek. ii. 4. *Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God.*

ASTONISHING is the patience which God has exercised in all ages towards his rebellious creatures. After their wickedness had attained such an height that he was constrained to pour out his indignation upon them at the Deluge, he still deferred his judgments an hundred and twenty years, that, if possible, he might reclaim the world by the ministrations of Noah. At a later period, when he had chosen to himself a peculiar people, and with mighty signs and wonders had brought them forth out of Egypt, and they requited all his kindness with nothing but murmurings and disobedience; though their provocations were beyond all conception great, he bore with them for the space of forty years, and would not utterly take away his loving-kindness from them. Again, when he had sent his people into captivity for the multitude of their iniquities, and especially for despising all his reproofs, and persecuting all his Prophets[a], he still would not altogether abandon them, but sent his servant Ezekiel to preach to them in the land whither they were carried captive. In the words of our text we are informed what Ezekiel was commissioned to say unto them: it was emphatically *this;* "THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD." We do not suppose that this was the whole of Ezekiel's message; but it was a peculiarly important and emphatical part of it: it was that which above all other things

[a] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.

things characterized the end and object of his mission. It is particularly to be noticed, that *no specific message is annexed to these words*; and that they occur twice also in the following chapter precisely in the same way[b]. Can we suppose that so peculiar a commission should contain in it no more than what appears upon the surface? Surely it must be acknowledged to be either very defective, or very comprehensive. To say that it was defective, would be to arraign the wisdom of God himself: we shall do well therefore to search into its real and extensive import. Three things then were evidently implied in it (which indeed are implied also in the commission given to Ministers at this day); namely,

I. To declare God's will—

[God has declared it unto *us* ——— And *we* are to declare it unto others with fidelity and affection ——— When objections are made to the word delivered, we must produce our warrant from the holy Scriptures, and remind them whose word it is; "Thus saith THE LORD GOD." With this we ourselves are to be satisfied; and we must require others to regulate their views by the infallible dictates of inspiration ———]

II. To assert His authority—

[We find men in a state of rebellion against God ——— We, as his ambassadors, are to offer them terms of reconciliation ——— If our terms be thought too humiliating, we must declare that God will never offer them any other; and that unless they accept these, they must inevitably perish ——— While we encourage them by representations of God's mercy and love, we must also intimidate them with exhibitions of his justice, his power, and his truth ———]

III. To seek, notwithstanding all our discouragements, the salvation of their souls—

[We must expect, that, if we discharge our duty aright, we shall meet with many and great discouragements: "briers and thorns will be with us; yea, we shall *dwell* among *scorpions*." But "nothing is to move us," "nor should we account even our lives dear unto us, so that we may but fulfil our Ministry," and be "pure from the blood of all men" ——— The saving of souls is the work committed to us; and we must prosecute that work, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear" ———]

LEARN

[b] Ezek. iii. 11, 27.

LEARN from hence,

1. The importance of the Ministry—

[God has ceased to impart his mind to men in a way of immediate revelation. His written word is that by which he now instructs the world: and he has set apart an order of men, whose duty it is to make known his revealed will. They are "not to teach for doctrines the commandments of men," but simply to declare what God himself has spoken. In the execution of their office they are God's ambassadors, yea, if we may so speak, his representatives: they speak to men "in Christ's stead;" and the word they deliver, is "not theirs, but God's." Whilst then, on the one hand, we magnify our office, we ought, on the other hand, to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?"]

2. The duty of those who are ministered unto—

[When a Minister is proclaiming, "Thus saith the Lord God," the people should "tremble at the word;" and, whilst he "declares the whole counsel of God," it becomes them to "receive it with meekness" and simplicity. They should not be offended at his fidelity, but be thankful for it. They would not commend a watchman, who should leave a family to be burnt in their beds, rather than alarm them with the cry of fire; or a sentinel, who should suffer a camp to be surprised by their enemy, because he would not alarm them by giving notice of their approach: much less then should they approve of those who "prophesy smooth things," and "speak peace unto them when there is no peace." "Those who have God's word, must speak God's word faithfully;" and those who hear it, should obey it cheerfully, and without reserve.]

DLXXVII.

APPROACHING END OF GOD'S FORBEARANCE.

Ezek. vii. 5—9. *Thus saith the Lord God: An evil, an only evil, behold is come. An end is come; the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come; the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee; and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways, and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the Lord that smiteth.*

EZEKIEL

EZEKIEL is perhaps the most terrific writer of all the Prophets: there is a force and energy in his denunciations which can find no parallel: his repetitions are so frequent, as to present before the view of the Reader the very judgments which he predicts. In the chapter before us we are made to see, as it were, the Chaldean army in the very act of desolating the city and temple of Jerusalem, and of carrying into captivity all who should survive the mortality occasioned by pestilence, by famine, by the sword[a]. In fact, the siege commenced within three years of these predictions, and terminated in their most exact accomplishment. It is not our intention to enter into the consideration of this prophecy as it relates to the Jews: we shall rather take occasion from it to observe in general,

I. That the final execution of God's judgments is fast approaching—

The period for the execution of them is certainly fixed in the Divine counsels—

["Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world. Nothing is left to chance: every thing takes place "according to the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God." We are ready to consider things as depending altogether on those by whose agency, or whose authority, they are done: but men are only instruments in God's hands: they are his sword, and the staff of his indignation; and they only carry into effect what "his hand and his counsel have determined before to be done." The elements in like manner all "fulfil his will." It was at the precise time that he had ordained, that the waters deluged the earth, and that fire and brimstone consumed the cities of the plain. As in the self-same night that had been foretold four hundred and thirty years before, God brought his people out of Egypt; so at the precise period fixed by him were they carried captive to Babylon, and dispersed all the world over at the destruction of their ecclesiastical and civil polity by the Romans. The time also for the day of judgment is fixed, though it is still hid in the bosom of the Father: and "the times," whether of communities or individuals, are altogether "in his hands."]

When that period is arrived, they will be executed to the uttermost—

[At

[a] See the foregoing Chapter.

[At present there is mercy mixed with judgment; but in the last day there will be "judgment without mercy." Wrath now comes on offenders with measured severity; but then without any other measure than their own deserts. Then the cup of God's indignation will be poured out for them without mixture, and they shall drink it to the very dregs[b]. Terrible is that name whereby the day of judgment is designated, "The day of the perdition of ungodly men[c]." This present time may, even in reference to the ungodly, be called "The day of salvation;" because salvation is freely offered to every one of them: but *that* is "the day of wrath," against which an accumulated and daily augmenting treasure of wrath is laid up for them, and shall "come upon them to the uttermost."]

This view of the day of judgment sufficiently shews,

II. That that time should be much and deeply contemplated—

Let us then contemplate,

1. Its gradual approach—

[Every day and every hour is bringing it nearer to us. The delay to us indeed may appear long: but it is nothing when compared with eternity: "A thousand years are in God's sight as one day, and one day as a thousand years." Profane persons and infidels will ask, as it were, in derision, "Where is the promise of his coming[d]?" but "their judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not[e]." Let *those who are advanced in life* consider this. *Their* days must of necessity be few; and consequently every hour should appear to them as it does to criminals under sentence of death; even the striking of the clock should remind them, that the hour for their departure is rapidly advancing, and must soon arrive. And *young persons too* should remember, that they also are liable to be cut off in the midst of their days; and that, even if they live to the age of man, their time will soon have passed away, and appear as a dream in the night. But our text informs us, that "the end Watcheth for us:" yea, "it may come as a thief in the night." Who then should not stand on his watch-tower, that he may be prepared for it?]

2. Its actual arrival—

[The day of judgment, whenever it shall arrive, will find men as much unprepared for it as at this moment. In the days of Noah, persons of every description engaged in their respective occupations with the same confidence as if nothing had been spoken respecting a deluge; "they ate, they drank, they planted, they builded, they married and were given in marriage, till the very day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came:" thus

[b] Rev. xiv. 10, 11. [c] 2 Pet. iii. 7. [d] ib. ver. 4.
[e] 2 Pet. ii. 3.

thus will it be also in the day of judgment; persons of every age and condition will be as secure as at any period of their existence, till the trumpet shall sound, and the Judge shall summon them to his tribunal. What a sound will this then be, "An end, the end, is come! Then will be an *end* of all that now renders life desirable; an end of all pleasures, whatever be their kind or quality; an end of all means of grace, no opportunity now remaining for prayer and seeking after God: there will be an end of all hope of mercy, the door of heaven being closed, as Noah's ark was, by the hand of God himself. Then will be "an evil, an only evil," such as will have no mixture of good in it. O what "a morning" will that be, when the voice shall sound, "Awake, ye dead, and come to judgment!" This will not be a mere echo, a delusion, "a sound reverberated from the mountains;" but a fearful reality. Let us for a moment contemplate the state of the antediluvian world, when they saw the face of the earth gradually disappearing, and the loftiest mountains sinking into the waters of the great deep: O what fear, what terror, what distraction would be visible on every side! Thus will millions, in the last day, be "calling upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb." Would to God that men would now endeavour to realize that scene; and that they would "prepare," whilst yet there is time afforded them, "to meet their God!"]

That time being the commencement of a never-ending eternity, it is obvious,

III. That we should spend our whole lives in preparation for it—

What is the preparation that becomes us?

1. We should humble ourselves before God for all our sins—

[When Nineveh was warned that in forty *days* it should be overthrown, the inhabitants, from the highest to the lowest, repented of their sins in sackcloth and ashes; yes, they, though heathens, and warned only respecting the death of the body, made this improvement of their time. How much more then should *we* do it, who are warned respecting the death of our souls, and know not that we have forty *hours* to live! If God will "judge us according to our ways," and "pour out his fury" upon all in proportion to their sins, methinks we should mourn over our sins day and night, and get them washed away in "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," even in "the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin."]

2. We should get our souls renewed by Divine grace—

[The

[The foolish virgins, as well as the wise, expected the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom: but the foolish were not careful to have oil in their vessels with their lamps: hence, when the cry was made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh! they had their oil to seek, and were therefore excluded from the marriage-feast[f]. This shews us what should be now our one concern. If we have not the Spirit of God dwelling in us, in vain will be all our profession, in vain the flame which arises only from our natural spirits: the distinction between us and others will speedily appear, and a corresponding judgment be passed upon us. How long he may delay his coming, or how soon he may arrive, we know not; and therefore we should not lose an hour in seeking that unction of the Holy One, which alone can fit us for the possession and enjoyment of the heavenly bliss.]

3. We should be watching against every thing that may unfit us for the Divine presence—

[This is the instruction which the Apostles uniformly give us: "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer[g]:" and again, "Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand[h]." There are dangers and temptations all around us: not only do evil things solicit our regard, but things that are most innocent often become a snare to us. Surely then it becomes "those who have wives to be as though they had none, and those who weep to be as though they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not[i]." "The fashion of this world is passing rapidly away;" and "then cometh the end." O! happy they who are prepared for it! Happy they "whose loins are girt, and whose lamps are trimmed, and whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching for him!" "What I say then unto one, I say unto all, Watch."]

4. We should be intent on finishing the work which God has given us to do—

[Our Lord cautions us to "work while it is day, for the night is coming, wherein no man can work." When the end cometh, there is no more scope for exertion, no further opportunity to supply what is defective, or to remedy what is amiss: "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave." "Whatsoever then our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might"———]

[f] Matt. xxv. 1—13. [g] 1 Pet. iv. 7. [h] Phil. iv. 6.
[i] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

DLXXVIII.

DUTY AND BENEFIT OF MOURNING FOR SIN.

Ezek. xi. 4. *And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for the abominations that are done in the midst thereof.*

THERE is in the minds of ungodly men an atheistical idea, that God "does not regard" the actions of men; and that, as to any interference in their concerns, "he has forsaken the earth." This was a common sentiment among the Jews[a]; and it *practically* obtains to a vast extent amongst us. To imagine that God notices such trifling matters as those which occupy our minds, is supposed to derogate from his honour. But God is omnipresent and omniscient: the minutest as well as the greatest things are all equally present to his all-seeing eye; and every thing is noticed by him with an especial view to a future day of retribution. This is particularly stated in the whole of the preceding chapter. The elders of Israel who were at Jerusalem were given to idolatry; but they were extremely anxious to conceal their practices from the eyes of men: hence they performed their idolatrous rites in some secret chambers of the Temple, which they had inclosed with a wall in order to a more effectual concealment. But God in a vision pointed out to his Prophet, who was at Babylon, every thing that was transacted in the Temple at Jerusalem: and, after having given him many successive and more enlarged views of the abominations that were committed there, issued an order to the angels who had charge over the city, "to go forth and slay" the offenders; but strictly prohibited them from coming near to any person to whom these abominations had been a source of grief, and who had, in consequence of that, been "marked in the forehead" by a person expressly commissioned for that purpose[b].

Though

[a] Ch. viii. 12. & ix. 9.

[b] Read the whole preceding Chapter, as connected with the text.

Though the whole of this was a vision, it was, in fact, a just representation of the distinction which God would make between the persons who were guilty of idolatry, and those who lamented its prevalence among them: and it may serve to shew us, in a very instructive way,

I. The character of the Lord's people—

Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates:" and, as it prevailed to an awful extent at that day, so Abominations of every kind yet prevail—

[They prevail *in the world* at large. We speak not now of the evils that are visible to all, but of those which are of a more hidden nature. In every order of society there are peculiar and appropriate evils, justified perhaps by those who commit them, yea, possibly dignified with the name of virtues, which yet are an utter "abomination in the sight of God." Were all the intrigues of the ambitious, the wantonness of the licentious, the deceits of the covetous, the characteristic arts of every class of sinners, exposed to view, what a mass of iniquity should we behold! Yet God beholds it all; a mass which infinitely exceeds our highest conceptions, and which none but God himself could endure to behold.

They prevail also, we regret to say it, even *in the Church* of God. It was amongst those who professed the worship of the true God, that all those abominations were practised in the Temple at Jerusalem: and we know that many lamentable evils were found in the Churches that were planted by the Apostles themselves. Can we wonder then if at this time tares be growing up with the wheat? It were vain to deny that there are many who dishonour their holy profession, and give sad occasion to the enemies of religion to blaspheme that name whereby we are named. The pride, intolerance, and overbearing conceit of Diotrephes may yet be found, amidst high professions of superior zeal and sanctity. Who has ever looked into the interior of religious societies, and not seen the same undue preference to some preachers, and contempt of others, as disgraced the Corinthian Church in the days of Paul? Who has not discovered many a Demas, who "loves this present world," and foregoes his spiritual advantages with a view to increase his gains[c]? It would be well if even the base crimes of falsehood, and overreaching, and dishonesty were not sometimes found in the skirts of those who would be thought to have kept their garments clean, yea, if intemperance also and uncleanness did not give the lie to their profession. But the more we inspect the sanctuary of God, the more we shall see occasion for humiliation

[c] 2 Tim. iv. 10.

humiliation and grief on account of many, who "have a name to live, but are dead;" and who, through their misconduct, "cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of." And such may well expect that "judgment shall begin with them[cc]." We need scarcely add, that evils prevail also *in the heart* even of true Believers. Paul himself confessed, that there was "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and sometimes bringing him into captivity to the law of sin in his members:" and, the more conversant we are with our own hearts, the more we shall bewail our innumerable short-comings and defects. Our impatience, our distrust of God, our unbelief, our obduracy, our sloth, our coldness in duties, our sad mixture of principle even in our better actions; our want of love to the Saviour, our want of compassion for our fellow-creatures, our want of zeal for God; alas! alas! our want of every thing that is good, may well make the very best of us "sigh and cry," and, like Paul, to account ourselves "less than the least of all saints," or rather as "the chief of sinners."]

To bewail these abominations is characteristic of every Child of God—

[Hear how Moses lamented them in his day[d]: how David also[e], and Ezra, bewailed them[f]: what extreme heaviness the Apostle Paul felt in his soul on this account[g]; and especially *in relation to those very evils which we have specified as obtaining amongst the professing people of God*[h]! And where is the saint in all the Bible who did not "groan within himself" on account of the burthen of his own in-dwelling corruptions[i]? The more any person knows of God and of his own soul, the more disposed he is to say with Job, "Behold, I am vile[k]!"

Before we proceed to the second point for our consideration, let us examine ourselves, whether these things are a burthen to us, yea, our chief burthen[l]?———We have no pretensions to true religion, any farther than we answer to this character———]

From marking thus minutely the character of the Lord's people, we proceed to notice,

II. Their privilege—

God sets a mark on every one of his people, a mark on their foreheads, whereby they are infallibly known to him, and shall assuredly be screened from the destroying angels. They shall be protected,

1. Here

[cc] Compare ver. 6. with 1 Pet. iv. 17.

[d] Deut. ix. 18, 19. [e] Ps. cxix. 53, 136. [f] Ezra ix. 3, 5.
[g] Rom. ix. 1, 2. [h] Phil. iii. 18, 19. [i] Rom. viii. 23.
[k] Job xl. 4. [l] Zeph. iii. 18. Jer. xiii. 17. Rom. vii. 24.

1. Here—

[The deliverance of Noah from the Deluge, and of Lot from Sodom, shews not only what deliverances God *can* vouchsafe to his chosen people, but what *may be expected* by all who *mourn over*, and *labour to counteract*, the abominations that are around them[m]. In Babylon, God interposed to effect a *literal* accomplishment of this prophetic vision; obtaining liberty for Jeremiah and others of his believing people, whilst the unbelieving part were visited with the heaviest calamities[n]. And at the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, the disciples of Christ were rescued, as it were by miracle, from all the horrors of the siege, whilst their unhappy and devoted brethren were left to experience such troubles as never came upon any other nation under heaven.

But, if God do not see fit to exempt his people from the calamities that fall on others, he will so support them under their trials, and so sanctify to them their afflictions, that they shall be constrained to say, "It was good for them to have been afflicted." He will enable them to "glory in tribulations," and to "take pleasure in distresses," as fruits of his paternal love, and as means of furthering in their souls the purposes of his grace.]

2. Hereafter—

[The seal which God has set in their foreheads will distinguish them from all others, as clearly as sheep are distinguished from goats. Nor will there be any danger of mistake in any instance whatever. In Egypt the destroying Angel did not smite one house whereon the blood of the Paschal lamb was sprinkled; nor will the judgments of God fall on one individual, who has laid to heart the abominations of Israel. "God has set them apart for himself;" and for him they shall be preserved. No evil shall "come near to him who has the mark in his forehead." Whilst "fire and brimstone are rained" down upon all others without distinction, these will be safely lodged in God's holy mountain, beyond the reach or possibility of harm.]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who think lightly of sin—

[By many it is thought a mark of weakness to sigh and cry for the sins of others, or even for our own[o]. But let those who have such light thoughts of sin, consider *what sin has done*, in this world, and especially in the world to come. What innumerable evils have existed, and do yet exist, throughout the world! yet is there not one in the whole creation, which is not the fruit of sin. And if we could obtain one sight of those dreary mansions, where fallen angels, together with all who have perished in their

[m] 2 Pet. ii. 5—9. [n] Jer. xv. 11. & xxxix. 11, 12.
[o] See their character drawn: Amos vi. 1, 3, 5, 6.

their sins, abide; or could hear but one groan of a damned soul; we should no more account sin a light matter: no indeed, it is "fools only, who make a mock at sin." If this do not suffice, let such an one consider, *what has been done to expiate sin.* Go, sinner, to Gethsemane, go to Calvary, and contemplate the agonies and death of your incarnate God; and then say, Whether sin be not a tremendous evil, for which no sighs or tears can ever be sufficient? But, without extending our thoughts to subjects so much beyond our reach, let us only observe *what have been the feelings of persons when once they were brought to a just sense of their sins:* let us hear the bitter lamentations of Peter, or the heart-rending cries of the converts on the day of Pentecost; and we shall no longer doubt what ought to be our views of sin, by whomsoever it may have been committed, whether by ourselves or others. Sure we are, that in the last day there will be no diversity of sentiment respecting this: the glorified saints, and the condemned sinners, will have but one view of this matter. O that *now*, even *now*, the judgment of every one amongst us might be rectified; and that, before another day, God might see reason to set his mark upon us, as "mourners in Zion!"]

2. To those who answer to the character described in our text—

[Persons who sigh and cry on account of sin, are apt to yield too much to desponding fears. But they have in reality abundant cause for joy and gratitude: for if, on the one hand, they be greatly burthened on account of sin, they have, on the other hand, reason to rejoice that sin is their burthen? Instead of being in so deplorable state as they imagine, they are in a state most pleasing to God, and most profitable to themselves. So pleased is God with those "who are poor and of a contrite spirit," that his eyes are fixed upon them with the utmost complacency and delight[p]: and the Lord Jesus, the Judge of quick and dead, repeatedly declares them blessed[q]. Let not any one therefore be dejected because of the depths of depravity which he sees within him; but let him rather conclude that God has discovered to him these hidden abominations; and let him beg of God to give him a clearer and fuller insight into them; that so his humiliation may be more deep, his faith more simple, his gratitude more lively, and his devotedness to God more entire. Nor let any one be afraid of seeing thus the corruptions of his heart: for, if only our self-knowledge drive us to Christ, and endear him to our souls, it will prove a source of every virtue; of contrition, of fear, of dependence on Christ, of love to his name, and of zeal for his glory. A sense of our necessities will make us cry unto him for the gift of his Spirit; and by that Spirit we shall be "*sealed* unto the day of redemption."]

[p] Isai. lxvi. 2. [q] Matt. v. 3, 4.

DLXXIX.

DEPARTURE OF GOD FROM HIS TEMPLE.

Ezek. xi. 23. *And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.*

THE vision with which the prophet Ezekiel was favoured, and which he records in the first chapter, is of very difficult interpretation. In it there were represented to his view four living creatures, all moved and actuated by the Spirit of God[a]; there were also wheels moved by them[b], and the glory of God enthroned above them[c]. The general import of this vision we apprehend to be, that the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the ministration of angels and holy men devoted to his service, manages every thing for the good of his Church. But from the eighth chapter God shews, that when his people shall provoke him by their impieties, he will withdraw from them, and give them up to all those judgments which their iniquities have deserved. This is at first but slightly intimated[d]; but in our text it is actually carried into effect. *The manner in which his departure took place,* is deserving of particular attention. It was by several successive steps; The bright cloud, which was the symbol of his presence, and which is here called "his glory," left the accustomed place of its residence between the Cherubim, and descended "to the threshold of the House[e]." From thence it moved to the court of the Temple, which was on the north side, whither the Cherubims had already moved[f]. After that, it went to the door of the last gate, attended both by the Cherubims and the wheels[g]. Then, lastly, with the Cherubims and the wheels, it deserted the city altogether, and went to the mountain on the east side of the city[h]. What was the design of God in all these gradual removes, but to manifest

[a] Ch. i. ver. 4—14. [b] ib. ver. 15—21. [c] ib. ver. 26—28.
[d] Ch. viii. 6. [e] Ch. ix. 3.
[f] Ch. x. 3, 4, 18. The word "*went*," ver. 4. should rather be, "*had gone*."
[g] ib. ver. 19. [h] Ch. xi. 22, 23.

manifest the reluctance with which he yields to the necessity imposed upon him, of leaving his people to the ruin they have merited?

Hence then we take occasion to shew,

I. How averse God is to forsake his people—

Look we to his declarations?

[What can be more express than his assertion, yea his oath, that he "has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness, and live[i]?" How pathetically does he lament the obstinacy of those who withstand all the influences, and defeat all the purposes of his grace: "How long shall it be ere ye attain to innocency?", "Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be[k]?" The idea of abandoning his people seems almost to overwhelm him: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim[l]?" But of all the passages in Holy Writ in which the Divine compassion towards obstinate offenders shines forth, there is none that exceeds the lamentation of our blessed Lord over Jerusalem; "O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things belonging to thy peace!" "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."]

Look we to examples?

[What more astonishing than the forbearance of God towards the antediluvian world during the space of one hundred and twenty years! Mark his patience also towards his people in the wilderness, where for forty years their conduct was one continued scene of murmuring and rebellion. Even towards the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had imbrued their hands in the blood of their Messiah, he commanded his messages of mercy to be delivered in the first place: that city which had exceeded all others in iniquity was to be the most favoured of any in the whole universe, by the united labours of all the Apostles. But we need no further proof of God's backwardness to cast off his people, than what we may all find in our own bosoms. We all are living monuments of his patience, and long-suffering, and forbearance. If his compassions had not been infinite, not one of us would have been here this day, to speak or hear of them.]

True it is, that "his Spirit will not always strive with men:" but yet he does not abandon them at once; as will appear, whilst we shew,

II. What

[i] Hos. viii. 5.
[k] Jer. xiii. 27.
[l] Hos. xi. 8. See also Ps. lxxxi. 13—16.

II. What are the different steps by which his approaching departure may be discovered.

God "has pleasure in the prosperity of his people:" but, when constrained to leave them, he manifests his anger gradually, in order to awaken them to repentance, and to prevent the execution of his severer judgments. He withholds,

1. The manifestations of his love—

[Whilst his people conduct themselves in a becoming manner, he delights in every possible exercise of mercy towards them. He "draws nigh to them," and "lifts up the light of his countenance upon them," and "sheds abroad his love in their hearts," and testifies to them of their adoption, and "witnesses with their spirits that they are his." But when they draw back from him, he withholds from them these gracious communications. They now pray indeed, but find not a present and prayer-answering God: they read also, but feel not that power and sweetness in the word which they once did: they attend ordinances, but find them not, as once, to be "the gate of heaven." The sun is hid behind a cloud; and they are no longer animated with his cheering rays: "I hid me," says God, "and was wroth, because they went on frowardly in the way of their hearts."

Inquire then, beloved, whether any such calamity as this is come upon you? If it be, know that this is God's first step towards a final departure; and if you do not arrest his progress by penitence and a renewal of your first works[m], he will go yet farther from you, and be brought back again to you with ten-fold difficulty. If you have lost the cheering presence of your God, know that he is already gone "to the threshold of the House."]

2. The influences of his grace—

[God is pleased to strengthen his people with might by his Spirit in their inward man, so that they are enabled to overcome the world, to mortify the flesh, and to withstand all the principalities and powers of hell. He endues them with grace sufficient for them: but, if they are unfaithful to the grace received, he will withdraw it, and leave them to the unassisted efforts of their own arm. Then, like Samson with his locks shorn, they will become weak as other men: the world will regain its ascendant over them: their natural propensities will return with renewed force: and Satan will be able so to practise his former wiles, as to gain the most fatal advantage over them. They are like Israel before Ai, because of the Achan in their camp[n].

Here then is another subject of inquiry for us. Do we find that we are less able than formerly to resist our besetting sins? that

[m] Rev. ii. 5. & iii. 3. [n] Josh. vii. 11, 12.

that we have less power to repress the workings of evil tempers, and of corrupt affections? Do we find that duty is more difficult than in former times, and sin more easy and pleasant? ——— Then we may know that God has gone, not to the threshold only, but even to the court. O fearful state! What cries, and tears, and labours, become the person that is reduced to it! He has not a moment to spare: if he would not lose God speedily and for ever, he must humble himself before God in dust and ashes: he must "repent and turn himself from all his transgressions, else his iniquity will become his ruin."]

3. The warnings of his Spirit—

[The conscience of one that lives nigh to God is made tender, as the apple of his eye: and if by any means he be betrayed into sin, he mourns, and weeps, and never finds a moment's rest, till he has "washed it away in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." But this sensibility is soon lost: it is God's presence only that preserves it: and if God's "Holy Spirit be quenched by us, he will give us over to a hardness of heart," so that the things which once would have occasioned the deepest humiliation, shall now scarcely produce a sigh.

And can it be, that any one is so far left, as to have his eyes blinded as to the malignity of sin, and his conscience seared as to the commission of it? ——— Yes: there are many who are thus "beguiled by Satan from the simplicity that is in Christ;" and they have reason to fear that God will speedily take his flight, and execute that threat, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy." Verily, "there is but a step between them and death."]

This leads us to set before you,

III. The dreadful state of those who are forsaken by him—

"Woe unto them," says God, "when I depart from them[o]!" yes, woe unto them indeed; for,

1. They are delivered up into the hands of their spiritual enemies—

[As, when Jesus had departed from Mount Olivet (*the very mountain on which the glory of God abode, when it had forsaken the temple and city*) that began to be fulfilled, "Your house is left unto you desolate:" and when, "by grieving and vexing the Holy Spirit we have provoked him to become our enemy," our case is become altogether desperate: he says concerning us, "They are joined to idols; let them alone." Then "the evil spirit that had been driven out, taketh to him seven other spirits to

[o] Hos. ix. 12.

to occupy our hearts;[p] and our "last state becomes worse than the first." Not that such a person must necessarily be given over to gross and open vice: he may be left under the power of pride and infidelity, or of terror and despondency, or of hardness and obduracy: but, to whatever he is left a prey, "God swears in his wrath, that he shall never enter into his rest."]

2. They live only to increase their guilt and misery—

[Every day they live, they only augment the measure of their iniquities: and, strange as it may seem, immediate death, though attended with immediate damnation, would be to them a mercy. In one view indeed, the shortest respite from death may appear a blessing: and so it would be, if they were not sealed up under condemnation: but, being "given over to a reprobate mind," they live only "to heap up misery against the last days," and to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." Unhappy soul, whoever thou art, when thus forsaken by thy God! "Good were it for that man if he had never been born."]

We will conclude this subject with answering two QUESTIONS:

1. How are we to reconcile this doctrine with other parts of Scripture?

[It is certain that the Scriptures speak much respecting the determination of God never to forsake his people[p]——— And we believe that God will fulfil his promises, and that not one of them shall ever fail. But there are passages equally strong on the other side[q]; and they in their place need equally to be enforced. The former are necessary to encourage hope: the latter, to excite our fear. The truth is, we apprehend, that no person is warranted in believing himself a Child of God, *any farther than* he has an evidence of it in the conformity of his soul to the will of his heavenly Father. With the progress of sanctification his confidence may well increase; but with a declension in sanctity there ought to be a proportionable relaxation of his confidence. When therefore he is in a truly spiritual state, he may fitly be carried forward on the wings of hope, and love, and peace, and joy: but when he declines from that state, he needs the quickening influence of jealousy and fear: and, if any "turn back unto perdition," they then prove to the world, that their former confidence was delusive; and we must say of them, as St. John does, "They went out from us; but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us[r]."

If

[p] 1 Sam. xii. 22. Isai. liv. 9, 10. Jer. xxxii. 40. Heb. xiii. 5.
[q] 2 Chron. xv. 2. 1 Cor. ix. 27. 2 Pet. ii. 20—22. [r] 1 John ii. 19.

If men would receive *the whole* word of God, without contending for human systems, they would find no such contradictions as they are apt to imagine: or, if they found some expressions which they knew not how to reconcile with others, they would at least learn to exercise candour towards those who differed from them, and to leave the full explanation of these hidden mysteries till the day when God himself shall cast the true light upon them. Our concern is, not so much to reconcile the difficulties of Scripture, as to learn from every part its appropriate instruction, and its legitimate use.]

2. How are we to avert this awful calamity?

[We should mark with extreme care the very first motions of the Deity that indicate his displeasure. The occasional hidings of his face should lead us to inquire, what there has been amiss within us, what neglects or miscarriages that have grieved his Holy Spirit. We should instantly betake ourselves to fasting and prayer, intreating him to "shew us, wherefore he contendeth with us?" Like Jacob, we should "wrestle with him all the night, and say, I will not let thee go until thou bless me:" and, having regained his presence, we should labour constantly to "keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." Were we thus to exert ourselves in the first instance, we should walk continually, as it were, in the light of his countenance: but if we disregard the first intimations of his displeasure, and suffer him to depart, from his throne to the threshold, from the threshold to the court, from the court to the gate, we shall find it no easy matter to recover the testimonies of his love, and the influences of his grace. "Be instructed then, (says the Lord,) lest my soul depart from thee[s]." Be instructed in the necessity of unintermitted watchfulness and prayer. Be instructed to "guard against the very appearance of evil," on your own part, and against the smallest withdrawment on the part of God. Thus will your whole life be a continual feast; and God will be greatly glorified in the whole of your conversation.]

[s] Jer. vi. 8.

DLXXX.

DELUSIVE CONFIDENCE REPROVED.

Ezek. xiii. 10—12. *Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an over-flowing shower; and ye, O*

great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?

SO deeply is unbelief rooted in the heart of man, that scarcely any testimony from God is ever received with the confidence it deserves. This appears throughout all the Sacred History: and our own lives are one continued exemplification of it. To his people of old God was pleased to give many repeated warnings of the judgments that were coming upon them: but the assertions of false prophets were always credited, in opposition to the declarations of God himself. By the prophet Ezekiel God forewarned the people of the captivity to which they would soon be reduced by their Chaldean invaders. He directed the prophet to set before their eyes symbolic representations of the calamities that awaited them; to dig through the wall of his house, and carry forth his goods by night, and to eat bread, and drink water, with quaking and trembling[a]. But false prophets persuaded the people that they had no cause for alarm; for that these signs related to distant times; and that there would soon be an end of the impending dangers. It seems that some, women, as well as men, conspired thus to counteract the influence of God's word upon the people; and that they sewed pillows to the arm-holes, or elbows, of persons, and covered their heads with kerchiefs, in order to intimate to them, that they might repose themselves in perfect ease and safety. To reprove these persons, and to confirm his former assertions, is the prophet's object in the chapter before us. He compares the men to persons building an ill-constructed wall, and daubing it with untempered mortar, which would be washed away by the first shower; and to the women he declares, that God would soon tear from the arms of their deluded followers the emblems of their delusion, and undeceive those whom they had so fatally led astray[b].

But

[a] See the whole preceding Chapter. [b] See the whole Chapter.

But it is not our intention to confine our remarks to that particular occasion. Similar conduct obtains amongst us at this day; and it calls for similar reproof. We propose therefore to consider,

I. Who are obnoxious to this reproof—

All ranks and orders of men who attempt to invalidate the messages of the Most High, are guilty of the evil here spoken of. It is justly imputable to,

1. Unfaithful Ministers—

[Not only amongst the Jews, but even in the Christian Church, there were many, who, professing themselves to be ambassadors of Heaven, were only deceivers of the people[c]. Their habit has at all times been, to "say, Peace, peace, when there was no peace[d]." Would to God that none of this character yet existed in the world! But are there not still some who keep out of view the desperate depravity of the human heart, the absolute necessity of a new birth, the impossibility of being saved by any righteousness of our own, and the duty of giving up ourselves wholly and unreservedly to God as his redeemed people? —— Are there not those who decry these things as enthusiasm; and who tell their hearers, that there is a smoother and an easier way to heaven than what the Scriptures have marked out? ——— If then such persons exist, say whether they do not resemble the prophets and the prophetesses spoken of in our text? ——]

2. Unbelieving people—

[Whether seduced by others or not, all are prone of themselves to speak peace unto their own souls: they will not receive the declarations of God concerning them: they cannot endure to think that they are in such danger as God's word declares them to be; or that the way to heaven is so strait and narrow as his Gospel represents it. They substitute some terms of their own in the place of those which God has prescribed; and they persuade themselves that they shall be saved at last, though they conform themselves in no respect either to the principles or practice of the Christian code ——— Are not these then daubing their wall with untempered mortar, and sewing to their arms pillows which shall be rent away? ———]

Let us then proceed to notice,

II. The warning here given them—

Their labour is, alas! and must ever be, in vain: it will end,

1. In

[c] 2 Cor. xi. 13. Gal. i. 6—8. 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2.
[d] ver. 10. with Jer. vi. 14.

1. In certain and bitter disappointment—

[Their wall will surely fall: and shall it not then be said to them, "Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?" Sad indeed will be the reproaches which both the deceivers and the deceived will cast on each other: the one will say, Why did ye mislead me? the others will say, Why did ye believe me in preference to the word of God? Sad reflections too will all cast upon themselves: Why did I set up my own opinion against the most express declarations of my God? — — — The very disappointment which the Jews experienced, when Ezekiel's prophecies were verified in the destruction of their city, and in their own captivity, will ere long be realized by all who now buoy themselves up with their own delusions. If they should intreat their God to give them an opportunity of undeceiving their surviving relatives, the answer will be, No: they have Moses and the Prophets; and if they will not attend to their voice, they must receive their deserved recompence.]

2. In irremediable and endless ruin—

[No further means of salvation will be afforded them. Their day of grace is irrecoverably gone: their state is fixed for ever. O to what anguish of heart are they now a prey! What weeping, what wailing, what gnashing of teeth do they now experience, under a sense of God's wrath, and in the prospect of its everlasting duration! This must assuredly be the end of all our self-deception. As "Ezekiel was a sign to the Jews[e]," so have we signs in plenty, that the threatened vengeance shall come[f], and that they who will not believe God's word shall find it true at the last[g] — — —]

ADDRESS,

1. To careless sinners—

[You will persuade yourselves that no evil consequence shall arise to you from your neglect of God and of your own souls. But will God falsify his word to save you? Do not entertain so vain, so impious, a thought. He will not, he cannot, deny himself: nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail — — —]

2. To self-complacent formalists—

[You profess to reverence the word of God, and to comply with its commands: but, whilst you rest in mere forms and ceremonies of religion, you greatly err. God requires the religion of the heart: you must have "the power of godliness as well as its form." The wall that you are constructing may look fair to the eye; but it will not stand: it is raised on a sandy foundation: it is formed of bad materials: it wants the cement of the Spirit: the

[e] Ezek. xii. 11.

[f] 1 Cor. x. 5—11. 2 Pet. ii. 4—9. Jude 6, 7. "Set forth for an example."

[g] Jer. xliv. 28.

the showers shall soon wash off its external covering; and the stormy wind shall scatter the loose materials: in the name of God we declare to you, that "it shall fall." Nothing will ever stand, but that which is laid on Christ as the foundation, and has all the graces of the Spirit for its superstructure———]

3. To inconsistent professors—

[Be it granted, that, as far as relates to your views of the Gospel, you are right: still we must look to the effects of the Gospel on your heart and life; and must declare unto you, that, if you do not manifest by your life and conversation that you have "the same mind as was in Christ," you only deceive your own souls: you may have a faith indeed; but it is no better than the faith of devils. From this point we cannot recede an hair's breadth. We do not say that you must possess sinless perfection; for then who could be saved? But we say, that no sin must have allowed, or habitual, dominion over you: the right eye, or right hand, if knowingly retained contrary to the will of God, will as effectually cast you into perdition, as any number of sins whatever: your condemnation indeed may be increased by a multitude of sins; but it will not be rendered more certain, than it is by one reigning sin. O that those who are worldly-minded, or covetous, or proud, or passionate, or impure, or slothful, or addicted to any one sinful disposition, would consider this! God says, By their fruits ye shall know them: and by their fruits they shall be known. If ever we would be Christ's, we must "walk as Christ walked."]

DLXXXI.

THE EFFECT OF GOD'S MERCY ON THE RENEWED SOUL.

Ezek. xvi. 62, 63. *I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.*

WHOEVER attentively reads the writings of the Prophets, will observe, that there is one image in particular which predominates, as it were, above all others, in representing and characterizing the departure of the soul from God; it is that of the violation of the nuptial vows. God has been pleased to speak of himself as the Husband of his Church: and hence, when his people have turned aside to idols,

idols, they are said to have "committed adultery with stocks and stones." Sometimes that idea is prosecuted with a minuteness, which, though proper for the time and occasion on which it was written, would not be suitable for an audience differently circumstanced. The prophet Ezekiel in particular, who seems to have been a man of a severer cast, and to have been intent only on communicating his sentiments as strongly and forcibly as he could, has given himself great latitude in this respect. He is not content with using here and there a metaphorical expression; he occupies a whole chapter in drawing, as it were, a parallel between a supposed adulteress, and the Jewish people. Certainly, this gives great force to his reproofs; because the minds of all are open to conviction, when truth is stated to them in a way which commends itself to their feelings and judgment. We shall not however follow him any farther than will be necessary for the elucidation of our main subject.

We should not, in the general, take occasion from the single word "*thee*" to investigate largely the character and conduct of the persons addressed: but here our subject absolutely requires that we should do so; since the whole chapter is occupied in delineating it; and a full consideration of it is necessary, in order to the obtaining of a right understanding of our text. We propose then, from a view of our text as connected with the whole chapter, to set before you,

I. The extent of man's wickedness—

We will give, in the first place, a brief summary of the chapter—

[It is here supposed that a child, from the moment of its birth, is left exposed in an open field, without any one to pay the least attention to it; and that in that situation, where it must speedily have perished, it is noticed by Jehovah, who instantly administers to all its wants, and thus preserves its life. It is then supposed, that, after this child has been brought up by him to a mature age, she is espoused to him and becomes his wife. He, in the character of her husband, loads her with benefits, so as to make her the admiration and the envy of all who behold her.

She-

She however, instead of requiting him with that love, and honour and fidelity that become her, abandons herself to open prostitution, and that too, not through the solicitations of others, but through the wilful depravity of her own heart; she herself being the tempter of all her paramours, and bestowing on them the gifts which her husband had conferred on her. By this licentious and infamous conduct she has compelled her husband to put her away, and to withdraw from her the means of exciting and compensating any more these iniquitous proceedings.]

Let us now mark how this image was applicable to Judah and Jerusalem—

[The Jews had been originally chosen in Abraham, their common father, when he himself was an idolater: and as soon as his posterity were multiplied in Egypt, they were reduced to such a state of destitution and misery, that they must have perished, if God himself had not miraculously interposed for them. But God had compassion on them, and brought them out with a high hand, and took them for his own peculiar people, and gave them an inheritance in the land of Canaan. There he elevated them to a high rank among the nations, insomuch that they were the envy and admiration of all who knew them; so great was their power, their opulence, their prosperity in every respect. But in time they turned from the worship of God to idols, and from confidence in God to a dependence on foreign alliances, which they sought and maintained at vast expense. "Thy renown," says the prophet, (ver. 14, 15.) "went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God. But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown." All manner of corruptions at length overspread the land, and provoked God, who was jealous for his own honour, to give them up to the desolations and miseries which they had so justly merited.]

But to us also, as well as to them, all this may be applied—

[View us *as men:* how helpless were we in our early infancy! yet through the goodness of God, who has been a father to us, we have been placed in situations of ease and honour, far beyond what, if left to ourselves without his paternal care, we could ever have obtained. God, having formed us for himself, has given us many rich endowments, such as were necessary for the filling of the situation to which he has advanced us. But what use have we made of all his gifts? Have we improved them in obedience to his will, and for the promotion of his glory? Have not our various talents, of mental energy, of bodily strength, of worldly property, been employed solely for our own personal

personal gratification, without any regard for Him to whom they properly belonged, and for whose honour they should have been employed? Verily there has not been any idol, however base, to whose service we have not devoted these things, rather than to the service of our God.

View us *as* Christians also, and the same wickedness may justly be laid to our charge. In our natural state we were altogether guilty and polluted, yea helpless, and hopeless. But the advantages which Almighty God has conferred upon us have been exceeding great: all the ordinances of his worship, all the offers of his grace, all the hopes of his glory, have been vouchsafed to us from time to time, in order to convince us of his love, and to stimulate us to an unreserved surrender of ourselves to him. But these things, instead of having been improved aright, have actually been made the means and occasions of our departure from him. We have rested in the ordinances, without any concern whether we enjoyed God in them or not: his offers of mercy have been brought to justify the idea, that we might sin against him with impunity: and the prospects of the eternal world have been considered as little affected by our present conduct. "This has been our way from our youth;" and it is equally prevalent in every class of the community.

Would an earthly husband be satisfied with such conduct in his wife? What wonder then is it if our heavenly Husband regard these our adulteries with grief and wrathful indignation?]

But if, on the one hand, these things shew the greatness of our depravity, they serve, on the other hand, most strikingly to illustrate,

II. The exceeding riches of God's grace—

Vile as the Jews had been, he promises in our text to restore them to his favour—

[That the same persons are addressed as have been described in all the preceding context, is evident from the two verses before our text. The two tribes of Judah and Benjamin having followed the Canaanites in their abominations, it is said, that "their father was an Amorite, and their mother a Hittite." Their character is then compared with that of Samaria and of Sodom (who are called their sisters), and is said to have been worse than either[a]. Yet, says God, I will restore "Sodom and her daughters (i. e. the heathen world at large), and Samaria and her daughters (i. e. the ten tribes of Israel), to their former estate;" and then, "when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger, I will give them to thee for daughters, but *not by* THY *covenant*[b]: and I will establish MY covenant with thee."

Here it is distinctly stated, that there shall be a restoration of the

[a] ver. 45—48, 51, 52. [b] ver. 53, 55, 61, 62.

the whole Jewish nation, together with a general conversion of the Gentiles: and that they shall be all united, not on the footing of the Covenant made with the Jews on Mount Sinaï, ("not by *thy* covenant,") but on the footing of the New "Covenant made with them in the days of their youth," even with Abraham their father: *this* is the covenant which he would re-establish with them; and according to the tenor of it he would freely forgive all their past iniquities, and restore them to the everlasting enjoyment of his favour. By this wonderful exhibition of mercy to them, "they should know assuredly that He, even Jehovah, is the only true God;" yea moreover, that He is their God for ever and ever.

This was so very partially fulfilled at the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon, that we cannot but look for a more complete fulfilment of it at a period yet future, but, we trust, not very remote.]

The promise however is, no doubt, to be extended to us also—

[However vile we may have been, God, if we seek him, will remember his holy covenant, and will accept us according to the tenor of it. In that covenant, provision is made for our every want. "It is ordered in all things and sure:" and it is *therefore* sure, because by it God gives all, and we receive all: God gives the new heart as well as pardon for past offences, and engages to make us his people, at the time that he gives himself to us as our God. Hear how plainly all this is declared in the Epistle to the Hebrews[c] —— The very distinction is there made between the Jewish Covenant that was made on Mount Sinaï, and the Covenant of grace which was made four hundred and thirty years before with Abraham: and the knowledge of the Lord will be universally diffused, not in theory only, but in the experience of every individual: "*for*," says God, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." This then is the promise which we now make known to you; that however you may have alienated your affections from God in times past, if you will but now return to him, your former iniquities shall no more be remembered, but God will be your God for ever and ever. O hear the very invitations of God himself[d] ——— and implore help from God to comply with them!]

But is not this a dangerous doctrine? Surely not, if we consider,

III. The effect of this grace upon every soul of man—

It is thought by those who have never experienced *this*

[c] Heb. viii. 8—12. [d] Jer. iii. 1, 12

this grace themselves, that it must of necessity puff up with pride and conceit all who receive it. But,

This is contrary to reason—

[If we maintain that man by nature is in the situation of this outcast child; that God, purely of his own mercy and grace, "looks upon us" in that situation, and "bids us live;" if, after all our innumerable transgressions, he invites us to repent of our iniquities, and to embrace his holy covenant; we should think that there is no possible scope for pride and self-conceit; since the very mercy which God exercises towards us is not founded in any actual, or foreseen, goodness in us, but wholly in the free and sovereign exercise of God's holy will. It is the man that arrogates some goodness to himself, and makes the superior worth of the individual to be the ground of God's peculiar favour to him, this is the man that is proud, and that puts the very crown of Jehovah upon his own head. Even in heaven itself, if such a man were ever to reach that blessed place, he would be robbing God of his glory, and ascribing his salvation, in part at least, to his own superior goodness, which was the first moving cause of God's mercy towards him.]

It is contrary to fact also—

["Then shalt thou remember thy ways, and be ashamed:" yea, "I will establish with thee my covenant, *that thou mayest* (what? be lifted up with pride? No: that thou mayest) remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." Here is the true state of every pardoned soul: the mercy of God towards him humbles him in the dust, and makes him to abhor himself in dust and ashes.

It would be thought by the generality, that the spirit of a loving, faithful and obedient wife would be proper for the spouse of Christ; and so it would, if that spouse had never violated her nuptial vows. But we are all like this adulterous woman: and, as an adulteress, who had been precisely circumstanced like her in the chapter before us, would, after being restored to the favour of her husband, never forgive herself, however freely he may have forgiven her, so will a gracious soul when restored to the Divine favour: yea, the very favour of God, in proportion as it is exercised towards him, will only create in the soul a deeper self-abhorrence for ever having sinned against so gracious a God. An admiration of God's goodness, and a lothing of its own vileness, will never cease to occupy the soul that has been thus restored.]

We call you then, in CONCLUSION, to remember,

1. Your

1. Your covenant mercies—

[How unspeakable are these! The very vilest of the human race may become the spouse of Christ, and be invested with all the honours and privileges of that relation. Will any of you be indifferent towards your God and Saviour, and reject the overtures which he now sends you by me? O remember, that as man and wife are one flesh, so "he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit with him." Let all of you seek to be partakers of this honour. It is by faith in Christ that you become one with him; and by the exercise of the same faith shall all the blessings of the everlasting covenant flow down into your souls———]

2. Your covenant engagements—

[You all know what engagements a wife enters into, when she is taking upon her the vows of the marriage-covenant. She is thenceforward to live altogether for him with whom she has contracted this solemn bond. O let every Believer know what he has undertaken, and consider what is to be his constant aim. You must not be contented with some few services; you must be aspiring after such measures of love and purity, as may render you more lovely in the eyes of your blessed Lord, and may cause his very name to be glorified in you. In the world that is approaching, when the Lamb will publickly take home his Bride, you will be clothed in fine white linen, suited to the occasion. Be preparing those robes, whilst yet you are here; and by the richest unctions of Divine grace be daily becoming meet for the bridal chamber: and then shall the nuptials soon arrive; and you shall be for ever happy in the bosom of your God.]

DLXXXII.

PARABLE OF THE TWIG OF A CEDAR PLANTED IN THE HEIGHT OF ISRAEL.

Ezek. xvii. 22—24. *Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know, that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken, and have done it.*

THE

THE promises of God to his Church are not unfrequently connected with, and, as it were, made to arise out of, his judgments denounced against his enemies. Of this we have a very striking example in the chapter before us, where the very images which are used to represent the guilt and punishment of the king of Judah are employed to prefigure the establishment and increase of the Church of Christ.

To understand the text aright, the preceding context should be considered.

The Prophet was commanded to deliver a riddle, or parable, that should set forth the conduct of the Jewish people in a mysterious, but just, light: and then, lest it should not be fully understood, he was to give them the true interpretation of it. Nebuchadnezzar, having taken Jeconiah king of Judah and all his princes captive to Babylon, would not entirely destroy Jerusalem, but made Mattaniah (whom he named Zedekiah) king in the place of Jeconiah his uncle, and suffered him to enjoy all the rights and honours of royalty, on the express condition of his holding them, not as an independent sovereign, but as tributary to the king of Babylon. All this was quite a gratuitous act; and it lay Zedekiah under the strongest obligations to fulfil towards his benefactor all the engagements that he had entered into, more especially as they were confirmed by a solemn oath. But Zedekiah, unmindful of his oaths, sought the aid of the king of Egypt, that so he might be delivered from what he considered as a disgraceful vassalage, and enjoy a sovereignty independent and uncontrolled. This treachery is represented by God under the image of a twig, cropt off a lofty cedar by a great eagle, and planted by him in a fruitful field, and growing so as to be highly respectable, though inferior in grandeur to the parent stock. This young cedar, dissatisfied with its state, spreads its roots towards another great eagle, (the king of Egypt,) in hopes that through his influence it shall attain a far greater eminence and fertility. But God, whose oath was thereby violated, declared, that the attempt should

should not prosper, but that, on the contrary, the perjured monarch, who was thus described, should bring ruin, irreparable ruin, on his own head[a]. From hence it might be supposed, that David's throne should never be re-established; but God promises, under precisely the same figure that had been employed to represent these things, that he will restore the kingdom of David, partly under Zerubbabel, but principally under the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ; and that, instead of being ever subverted, like the Jewish polity, or the kingdoms of this world, it shall stand for ever and ever, a glorious monument of his power and truth.

We propose to consider this prophecy,

I. As already accomplished—

The Church, though low in its origin, is become exceeding great—

[The Lord Jesus Christ, the Founder of it, was brought into the world when the Family of David was reduced to a very low and abject state. He is fitly called "A rod out of the stem of Jesse[b]," that "grew up as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground[c]." During the whole time of his sojourning on earth, he existed in a state of the deepest humiliation: and his Church which he established consisted only of himself and a few poor fishermen. However, this twig, being planted in the height of Israel, grew, and "brought forth boughs, and bare fruit, and speedily became a goodly cedar." Great and vehement were the storms which menaced its existence; but it withstood them all; and in a little time it spread its branches throughout all the Roman empire. Then "birds of every wing (that is, Jews and Gentiles) came to dwell under its shadow," and to be nourished by its fruits. At this hour its growth is visible from year to year: and in due season it will fill the whole earth, and be the one centre of union, and source of happiness to all mankind.]

And thus far God is greatly glorified in it—

["Every tree of the field must know" whose work this is, and to whom all the glory of it belongs. Who can survey the Church in its infancy, and not wonder that it was not rooted up as soon as ever it was planted? Every arm was lifted up against it:

[a] This was preached within about three weeks of Buonaparté being sent to St. Helena. The extraordinary resemblance between his fate and Zedekiah's, as well as of *the grounds and occasions of it*, cannot fail to strike the attentive Reader, who compares them together. See ver. 18—21.

[b] Isai. xi. 1. [c] Isai. liii. 2.

it: all the powers of the world combined for its destruction; and not one friend or ally was found for it on the face of the whole earth. The great empires of the world, the Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, Grecian, Roman, all successively fell to ruin, notwithstanding the efforts made for their preservation: but the Church, without any sword but the word of God, or any shield that was visible to human eyes, stood, and stands to this day, deriding all the efforts of men or devils to subvert it. Who then, we would ask, Who is it that has thus "brought down the high tree, and exalted the low? Who is it that has thus dried up the green tree, and made the dry tree to flourish?" Is not all this the work of God? Verily, the burning bush has been a just and lively exhibition of the Church in every age: God was in it, and therefore it was not consumed. In like manner we may speak of every individual branch or twig that grows upon this tree; Who is it that has preserved even the meanest of the saints, in the midst of all the difficulties and trials he has had to contend with? Must it not be said of all, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God?" Yes, in every tree of righteousness which is the planting of the Lord, God, and God alone, must be glorified[d]. If St. Paul himself was constrained to say, "Not I, but the grace of God that was with me," it will scarcely be thought that any one else can arrogate to himself the honour of his own growth, stability, or fruitfulness.]

Gloriously as this prophecy has been already fulfilled, it should be contemplated by us,

II. As yet further to be accomplished—

The Church will doubtless be yet more widely extended through the earth—

[In truth, this cedar has attained at present but a small measure of its destined growth. It is but in a small part of the world that even the name of Christ is known: and, where his religion is professed, there are but few, very few indeed, who experience its renovating power. But it shall not be always thus: the time is coming when "he will multiply them that they shall not be few, and will glorify them that they shall not be small[e]." Then, in a far different sense from what can be affixed to the words at this time, shall it be said, that "fowl of every wing come to dwell under the shadow of this goodly cedar;" for "all shall know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest:" "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him:" "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."]

Then shall God be more abundantly glorified in it—

[The whole Church, and every individual in it, is to God "for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory." It is in his hands

[d] Isai. lx. 21. & lxi. 3. [e] Jer. xxx. 18, 19.

hands "a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty[f]." But how greatly will his power and goodness appear, when "all flesh shall see the salvation of God," yea, and actually enjoy it! If now, when the attainments of his people are so low, he is honoured, how will he be glorified when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold as the light of seven days!" And how will he be exalted in that day, when all his saints from the beginning of the world shall be gathered in one bright assembly, and shall join together in one general chorus; how, I say, will he *then* "be glorified in his saints, and admired in all that believe!"———]

Viewing now the Lord Jesus Christ, or rather his holy religion, as this goodly cedar, let us, in CONCLUSION,

1. Come and rest under his shadow—

[Verily there is no rest for us any where else: we are like "the dove which Noah sent forth from the ark, and which could find no rest for the sole of her foot but in the ark itself." But if we feel our need of a Saviour, if we are sensible that without an interest in him we must for ever perish, then let us attend to his inviting voice, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"———]

2. Give him the glory of all the rest we enjoy—

[Nothing can be more offensive to God than "the sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag." This is a provocation which God will not endure: he will not give his glory to another," nor will he suffer "any flesh to glory in his presence." Let us in particular remember, that by the law of faith, that is, by the Gospel, "boasting is, and must for ever be, excluded." For the Saviour that he has given, for the inclination and ability which we have to trust in him, and for all the grace that we have derived from him, we must say, "Not unto me, O Lord, but unto thy name be the praise." Let us remember, that by covenant and by oath we are bound to trust in him alone: let us not then, like Zedekiah, be bending our roots towards any other, or be looking to any other confidence; but let us seek to please him only whose servants we are, and to glorify him only who hath done so great things for us.]

[f] Isai. lxii. 3.

DLXXXIII.

EQUITY OF GOD IN HIS JUDGMENTS.

Ezek. xviii. 25—30. *Ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your*

your ways unequal? When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, Are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.

THERE is a general disposition in man to reply against God; and rather to arraign his justice, than to condemn himself. Occasion was taken for this by the Jews of old, even from the declarations of the Law and the Prophets. The Law had said, that God would "visit the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation;" and the Prophets had frequently declared, that the iniquities of Jeroboam, Manasseh, and others, should be visited on their descendants. From hence the Jews profanely characterized the Divine procedure by this proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge[a]." They did not consider, that they themselves were sinners like unto their fathers, and merited for their own iniquities every judgment which God had threatened to lay upon them; nor did they ever consider, that if God was pleased to exercise forbearance towards some, he was not necessitated to continue it towards all, when he saw that the very exercise of it emboldened men the more to sin against him: nor did they ever consider, that the menaces, which were uttered in reference to temporal judgments, were erroneously interpreted, when they were applied to the judgments of the eternal world. The prophet therefore was instructed to expostulate with them on their misinterpretation of God's word; and to declare to them, that though

[a] ver. 2.

though in this world children must unavoidably participate in the judgments of their fathers, it should not be so in the world to come: *there* the son should not bear in any respect the iniquity of the father, nor the father of the son; but "the soul that sinned, it should die." In confirmation of this truth, the prophet argues with them in this chapter, wherein *the whole plan of the Divine proceedings*, in reference to the different characters of mankind, is *stated, vindicated,* and *improved.* It is,

I. Stated—

If the righteous man turn away from his righteousness, and die in his sins, he shall perish—

[This is a solemn truth, which men strive by every possible method to evade. When Christian *principles* are insisted on, they will speak of *practice:* but here, when *practice* is spoken of, they will recur to *principles*, and deny that a righteous man *can* so turn away from his righteousness as to perish in his sins. They are like the Samaritan woman, who, when our Lord reproved her for her adulteries, had recourse immediately to controversial matters, and inquired, who were right, the Samaritans, or the Jews, as to the place where Divine worship ought to be performed? Ungodly professors of religion now fly off from what comes home to their own bosoms, and enter on controversy in order to avoid the awful truth that is brought to their ears. But it is a fact, that a righteous man may depart from his righteousness: Demas did[b]: Paul was constrained to use the utmost possible care, lest he should[c]: and all are commanded to take heed to themselves, lest they should do so too[d]. As to God's secret decrees, no man knows what they are, as relating to his own person, or to the person of any individual whatever: nor is there a man in the whole universe that is warranted in saying, *I never can fall; at least, can never so fall as to perish.* David, and Solomon, and Peter, display sufficiently the instability of man; and, if they were restored, their restoration does not shew that they *could not* have perished, but only, that God, for the magnifying of his own grace and mercy, did not leave them to perish. They might have perished, and would have perished, as much as Judas, if they had been left to themselves: it was not any gracious principle which they had in them, and that was in itself indefectible, that recovered them, but God's unbounded grace and mercy, vouchsafed to them according to the good pleasure of his own will.

Hear this then, ye professors of religion, ye who are accounted righteous,

[b] 2 Tim. iv. 10. [c] 1 Cor. ix. 27.
[d] 1 Cor. x. 12. Heb. iii. 12, 13.

righteous, and who think yourselves righteous; ye may turn away from your righteousness, and perish. O let this consideration lead you to the utmost vigilance, and stimulate you to the most unremitting exertions in the path of duty!]

On the other hand, if the wicked man turn from his iniquity, and do what is lawful and right, he shall live—

[Delightful reflection! Hear it, ye sinners of every description: it is the declaration of the Most High God. You must turn indeed from your iniquities, and especially from your besetting sin, mourning over it, fighting against it, bringing it into subjection. You must also be doing all that God requires of you in his blessed word. You must flee to Christ for refuge from the wrath of an avenging God: you must trust altogether in his meritorious death and passion: you must renounce every other hope; and must seek "to be found in Him, not having your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." You must also, in dependence on his Holy Spirit, endeavour to fulfil the whole will of God, and to "walk in every thing as Christ walked." And if indeed ye act thus, we declare, in the name of almighty God, that "ye shall never perish, but shall have eternal life." As the foregoing characters entertain too little fear, so you are apt to indulge too much; and, because things have been ill, you are ready to suppose they never can be such as to warrant an expectation of the Divine favour. To remove these apprehensions, God *repeats* his gracious assertions respecting you, and declares that you, if you turn to him in the way before specified, "shall surely live; you shall not die." Whatever your sins may have been, they shall all be blotted out as a morning cloud; nor shall so much as one of them ever be remembered against you: though they may have been of a crimson dye, you shall, in the sight of God himself, be white as snow. As the righteousness of the righteous shall never be remembered, when once he departs from it; so neither shall the wickedness of the wicked, when once he turns from it. The present character of every individual is that which shall determine his eternal state.

One would think that such a procedure as this should not stand in any need of vindication: but men, notwithstanding the obvious and undoubted equity of it, will complain of it as unjust.]

In our text however it is,

II. Vindicated—

Inequality indeed there is in abundance on the part of men—

[Every description of sinners is chargeable with injustice towards

towards God. *The profane sinner* accounts it very hard that his sins are to be visited with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. What has he done that deserves such a sentence as this? Why did God give him passions, if he is to be punished to all eternity for the indulgence of them? and, supposing his conduct to be sinful, what proportion do the sins of a few days or years bear to the everlasting torments of hell? He cannot believe that God will ever be so unmerciful and unjust as to execute on men the threatenings of his word. *The proud formalist* thinks it strange indeed that he is to perish. What! must *he*, who has been so sober, so moral, so regular, so observant of all his duties to God and man, must *he* perish, because he does not adopt the principles, and imitate the practice, of a few wild enthusiasts? No: he hates fanaticism; and will never believe that God requires all that strictness which some enthusiasts speak of; and much less that he will ever banish from his presence those whose whole lives have been so blameless as theirs. *The hypocritical professor*, who can talk of Christ, and exert himself zealously to promote the Gospel, cannot imagine, that *he* should be obnoxious to the Divine displeasure, or that God could be at all just in condemning *him*. True indeed, he does not always adhere to truth, and perhaps is not very strictly just in his dealings: his cares about the world too engross almost all his thoughts; nor has he any pleasure in the duties of the closet: evil dispositions too are unhappily very prevalent in him; pride, anger, envy, hatred, malice, evil-speaking, uncharitableness, retain more or less the ascendant over him; perhaps too intemperance and impurity, if not indulged to such an extent as to expose him to public disgrace, are far from being mortified so as to give way to the habitual exercise of the opposite virtues. But can it be that God should reject *him*, when all his confidence is in Christ, and in the covenant which God has made with us in Christ?

Such are their modes of arguing on the subject of God's final judgment. But we ask, What equity is there in such expectations as these? Is it equitable that a man who lives altogether without God in the world, should be placed on the same footing with one who devotes himself entirely to God? Is it equitable that a man who possesses no more than a form of godliness should find the same favour with God as one who lives under the continued influence of its power? Is it equitable that a professor of religion who in no respect adorns his holy profession, should be honoured of God like one who is a bright pattern of every virtue, and daily increasing in a conformity to his Lord and Saviour? We ask, Is there any equity in such things? Will any reasonable Being venture to say, that such a procedure is becoming a God of holiness and truth?]

But on the part of God there is no such inequality—

[The

[The moral and religious character of men will be the one *ground of all his decisions in the day of judgment:* "According to your ways and according to your doings will he judge you, O house of Israel." "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings: but woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him[e]." This is what in God's name we are authorized and commanded to declare. Respect indeed will be had to the means and opportunities which different persons enjoyed; and on this principle, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for the Jews who rejected the ministry of our Lord: but still there will be one test to which every man will be brought, namely, How did you improve the privileges you enjoyed, and how did you act up to the principles you professed? No favour will be shewn to any man because he was a Jew, nor will any man be despised because he was a Gentile: "the uncircumcision of the Gentile will be reckoned to him for circumcision, if he keep the law; and the circumcision of the Jew be reckoned for uncircumcision, if he break the law." The conformity of every man to the mind and will of God, as far as he had an opportunity of knowing it, will be the object of inquiry; much or little being required of him in proportion to what has been committed to him: and according as he has neglected or improved his talent, shall be the sentence passed upon him; regard being had, not to the state of a man at any former period of his life, but to his state at the time that he is summoned to the judgment-seat. Now can any man condemn this as unequal or unjust? *Twice* does God appeal even to the very people that presumed to accuse him; and twice does he challenge them to say, On whose part inequality is chargeable, their own, or his?]

The prophet, assuming that after this statement there must be an end of the controversy, shews how these determinations of God should be,

III. Improved—

It is to no purpose that God has declared these truths, if they have not a practical operation on our minds. The prophet therefore improves the subject for us, by a word,

1. Of direction; "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions"—

[Repentance is necessary for every Child of man: "God commandeth all men every where to repent." But it is not a partial repentance that will suffice: we must "turn from *all* our trans-

[e] Isai. iii. 10, 11.

transgressions: there must be no exceptions, no reserves; no right eye, which we will not pluck out; no right hand, which we will not cut off. *The profane sinner* must abandon all his evil ways, and turn unto God with his whole heart. *The proud formalist* must renounce all his self-dependence, and must live a life of faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of entire devotedness of heart to God. *The inconsistent professor* also must be brought to a sense of his peculiar guilt and danger; and must become like his blessed Lord and Saviour in all his tempers and dispositions, in all his spirit and deportment towards God and man.

True it is, that these things cannot be done by any power of our own: but this is no reason that we should not address ourselves to the work; nor will it be any excuse for not accomplishing the work, since God has promised to give his Holy Spirit unto all that ask him, and has assured us that his grace shall be sufficient for us. This then is the direction which all must follow: and the foregoing statement clearly shews how important it is that we should follow it earnestly and without delay.]

2. Of encouragement; "So iniquity shall not be your ruin"—

[Iniquity must be our ruin, if we do not thus repent: nothing can save us: God himself, if we may so speak, cannot save us; because he cannot depart from the rules which he has prescribed to himself for his procedure in the last day. However much he may desire to extend mercy to us, he will not do it to the dishonour of his own perfections, and to the destruction of all the established principles of his moral government. No: "except we repent, we must all" inevitably and eternally "perish." But if we thus repent, all will be well: our iniquities, whatever they may have been, shall all be put away from us, as far as the east is from the west. Hear the declaration of the Most High God: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon[f]." O let this sink down into our ears: let it encourage us to put away all our hard thoughts of God, and to seek him with our whole hearts. Let us search and try our ways: let us bring ourselves to the touchstone of God's unerring word: let us now so "judge ourselves, that we may not hereafter be judged of the Lord:" and, if a fear arise in our minds that our sins are too great to be forgiven, let this thought comfort us, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound; and that, as sin has reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."]

[f] Isai. lv. 7.

DLXXXIV.

MEN'S TREATMENT OF THE GOSPEL.

Ezek. xx. 49. *Then said I, Ah, Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?*

THE word of God, by whomsoever spoken, should be received with reverence and godly fear. Great care indeed should be taken to examine whether the word which is spoken in his name be agreeable to the Sacred Oracles; but when that point is ascertained, then we should bow before it, and submit ourselves wholly and cheerfully to its directions. This is the plain dictate of reason and common sense: but yet it is far from being the regulating principle of men's actions; for, at the very time that men acknowledge the Divine authority of the word delivered, they set themselves in a variety of ways to invalidate its force, and to withstand its influence. The Jews who came to inquire of Ezekiel had no doubt of his being a prophet, inspired of God to declare unto them his holy will. Yet when he did deliver to them the messages sent by his Divine Master, they poured contempt upon them, and said, "Doth he not speak parables?"

From hence we shall take occasion to shew,

1. How the messages of God are treated—

The import of the observation made by the Jews on Ezekiel's ministrations seems to have been, that his word was altogether so figurative and unintelligible as to be unworthy of any serious attention. It may be thought perhaps that this was a singular case; but it is, in fact, a just specimen of the way in which the messages of God have been treated from the beginning of the world—

[When Noah preached to the antediluvian world, he was regarded as a weak alarmist, who merited only their pity and their scorn. When Lot warned his family of the impending judgments that would soon fall on Sodom and Gomorrah, "he seemed," we are told, "as one that mocked to his sons-in-law." When Jehu was informed by a prophet that God had destined him to assume the royal authority, the messenger was designated by the title,

title, *that mad fellow*; "What said that mad fellow unto thee?" If we come to the New-Testament dispensation, we find our blessed Lord himself, who "spake as never man spake," treated in the same contemptuous manner: *many* of the Jews said of him, "He hath a devil, and is mad: why hear ye him[a]?" and again, "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil[b]?" The name, "that deceiver," seems to have been given him by his enemies as a common appellation[c]. His Apostles met with precisely the same reception. St. Paul was accounted a babbler; and when speaking most unquestionably "the words of truth and soberness," was thus reviled; "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning hath made thee mad[d]." And is it not thus at the present day? Is not every one who delivers the word of God with fidelity and boldness represented as a fanatic, and a deceiver? Some condemn the *matter* of his discourses, as visionary, as erroneous, as unnecessarily strict, or as lax even to licentiousness. Others condemn the *manner*: if it be firm, it is harsh; if affectionate, it is canting; if written, it is dull; if unwritten, it is enthusiastic, and devoid of sense. In a word, it is now as in the days of old: when John came, neither eating nor drinking, it was said he had a devil; and when our Lord came with condescending freedom, "eating and drinking," it was said of him, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners:" and in like manner we, "whether we pipe or mourn," are equally unacceptable to our hearers, and obnoxious to their censure[e].

It is worthy of observation too, that the opposers of the Gospel seem never to entertain a doubt but that they are quite correct in all the censures which they pass upon those who minister the word unto them. "Doth he not speak parables?" was in the apprehension of Ezekiel's hearers an obvious fact; and the inference which they drew from it, namely, That he was unworthy to be regarded, was in their estimate perfectly legitimate and undeniable. So now the folly of all who preach the Gospel, and the consequent propriety of disregarding every thing they say, are considered as so plain, that none but persons equally weak with themselves can entertain a doubt upon the subject.]

If such be indeed the treatment generally given to the Lord's messages, it will be useful to inquire,

II. Whence it is they are so treated—

Doubtless persons who mean well may both speak and act with considerable indiscretion, and may by their injudicious conduct cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. But as the treatment of God's messages

[a] John x. 20. [b] John viii. 48. [c] Matt. xxvii. 63.
[d] Acts xvii. 18, & xxvi. 24. [e] Matt. xi. 16—19.

messages is the same by whomsoever they are delivered, we must look for the reason of it, not so much in the messengers, as in those to whom they are sent. There are then in the hearers of the Gospel many obstacles to a just reception of it;

1. A pride of understanding—

[Men think themselves qualified to sit in judgment upon the word of God, just as much as upon any human composition; and, when it accords not with their pre-conceived opinions, they do not hesitate to pronounce it foolishness[f]. To receive it with the docility of little children they would consider as a degradation to them. They account it not indeed a degradation to children to receive instruction from their parents, or their authorized instructors; but they see not any such distance between the mind of God and theirs, as to call for any such submission to him on their part, though "they are born like a wild ass's colt." Hence it must necessarily arise that they will stumble, and be offended, at the great mysteries of Redemption.]

2. An independent spirit—

["Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" is the reply, which, not Pharaoh only, but the whole host of rebels, make to the commands of God. It is awful to observe how little weight the authority of God has in influencing the conduct of the world. Tell them how much their interest will be affected by this or that line of conduct, and they will give a patient attention to your advice: but speak of God's judgments, and they will "puff at them" with sovereign contempt[g]. Such treatment they themselves would not endure, for a moment, from a child or servant of their own: but they offer it to God without any self-reproach, or any fear of his displeasure. They will not indeed confess that they thus oppose themselves to their Maker: they will maintain, that the word spoken to them is no just expression of his will: but this is a mere cover to their rebellion: they will not comply with his commands, and therefore they will deny altogether that they proceed from him, or else will so interpret them as altogether to change their import, and evade their force.]

3. An inveterate aversion to holiness—

[To a formal and external righteousness many are not at all averse; they rather love it, as a substitute for spiritual obedience. But bring to their view the requisitions of God's law, and they cry out against them, as unreasonably severe, yea, as utterly impracticable and absurd. Our Lord himself informs us, that this is the true source of their rejection of his word: "They love darkness rather than light: they even hate the light, and will not come

[f] 1 Cor. i. 18, 23. & ii. 14. [g] Ps. x. 5.

come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved." No wonder that they cry, "Doth he not speak parables?" when they are determined beforehand not to understand the plainest declarations.]

Before any determine thus to reject the messages of Heaven, it will be well for them to consider,

III. What consequences must ensue from this treatment of them—

Certainly,

1. All the ends of our Ministry among them must be defeated—

[It is in vain to speak to those who will not hear: the invitations, the promises, the threatenings of Scripture can be of no avail to those who will not acknowledge the authority of God in them. What a melancholy reflection is this, that God should send ambassadors to men with messages of peace and love, and that men should "make light of them," and recompense with hatred and contempt every effort that is made for their salvation. Well might Paul "have continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart," when he reflected on the state of such persons, and that, instead of having to present them to God as his joy and crown, he should have to appear as a swift witness against them in the day of judgment.]

2. Their guilt and condemnation must be greatly aggravated—

[No man leaves the House of God as he came into it: the ordinance which he has attended has either brought him nearer to heaven, or prepared him more as fuel for the fire of hell. If the word be not "a savour of life unto life, it is a savour of death unto death." Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that "if he had never come and spoken unto them, they would comparatively have had no sin:" but that in consequence of their rejection of his proffered mercies, "the state of Sodom and Gomorrah would be more tolerable in the day of judgment than theirs." In like manner we must say to our hearers, that every opportunity of instruction which they have enjoyed is a talent to be accounted for; and that their hiding of it in a napkin will be a ground of their condemnation[h].]

APPLICATION—

[And now what account must we carry to our God concerning you? He has sent us to deliver his messages; and he will require of us some account of the manner in which they have been received amongst you. And what shall we say? Must we not,

[h] John iii. 19.

not, in reference to the greater part of you, say, "Ah! Lord God," we come with a painful report: we would have rejoiced to have told thee, that thy word had had "a free course, and been glorified amongst them;" but we are constrained to declare, that, if not in word, yet at least in spirit, they say of us, "Doth he not speak parables?" Some do really think that the message we deliver is no other than "a cunningly-devised fable;" whilst others, acquiescing in it as coming from thee, are too busy, or too careless, to pay any respect to it. Some, it is true, take a pleasure in hearing thy word, just as Ezekiel's hearers did; but, like them, they will not comply with any one of thy commands: their cares, their pleasures, their desire of earthly things, carry them away, and entirely engross their minds: they are hearers of thy word, but not doers of it: and though they sometimes are made to see their face as in a glass, they go away, and presently forget what manner of men they are. Thus, though they differ from one another in many things, they agree in this, namely, to refuse subjection to thy blessed word, and to follow the imaginations of their own hearts.

This however is not the case with all: there are some who receive the word, "not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." Some there are that say of us, We have been messengers of glad tidings to their souls, and instruments in thy hands for their eternal welfare. The Saviour whom we have announced to them is precious to their souls; they look to him; they trust in him; they rejoice and glory in his salvation; and they shew forth their faith by their works. "O Lord God, what thanks can we render unto thee for all the joy wherewith we joy before thee on their account!" truly "they are our glory and joy." O blessed Lord, increase their number an hundred fold; and "establish all their hearts unblameable in holiness unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!" that when we shall be summoned to thy judgment-seat to give up our account to thee, we may do it with joy and not with grief. Let not one of them turn back again to perdition; but keep them all stedfast in faith and love and holiness, that we may have the joy of presenting them perfect before thee in that day, saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me!"

DLXXXV.

OFFICE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF MINISTERS.

Ezek. xxxiii. 8. *When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die! if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand.*

THE

THE office of a Minister is the most important and most difficult of any that we can be called to sustain. It is the most important, because the salvation of multitudes depends upon it: and it is the most difficult, because it requires such self-denying habits, and spiritual affections. The responsibility also that attaches to it is such, that no man would dare to take it upon himself, if he had not a promise of peculiar assistance in the discharge of it. Ministers are the messengers of God to men: to them they must faithfully declare his whole counsel: however painful the truths may be which they are to deliver, and however averse men may be to hear them, they must execute their commission at the peril of their souls. To this effect God speaks in the words before us: in which we may notice,

I. What God saith to the wicked—

It is scarcely possible to conceive a more solemn declaration than that before us; "I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die!" Consider,

1. Who are the people addressed—

[These are all who do not unfeignedly turn from sin to God. It matters not whether they be rich or poor, old or young, learned or unlearned. In some sense, it matters not whether their sins have been more or less heinous: for though there certainly are degrees of guilt, and some are more wicked than others, yet all are wicked, who are not following after God in righteousness and true holiness; and consequently, all such persons, however their characters may vary in other respects, are addressed in the text.]

2. The declaration of God unto them—

[Death is here denounced as the judgment to be inflicted on all who turn not to their God: and to the same effect the Inspired Writers uniformly speak[a]. Nor are we at a loss to determine what is meant by "death:" it is the wrath of God[b], the misery of hell[c]. This is the judgment that will come upon every individual who shall be found in the state before described. God may be considered as addressing himself to every individual of the human race; "O *thou* wicked man!" Nor is this fatal result of wickedness expressed in doubtful terms: there is no peradventure; the decree

[a] Isai. iii. 11. Rom. vi. 23. Jam. i. 14, 15.
[b] Rom. i. 18. [c] Rev. xxi. 8.

decree is fixed; "Thou shalt *surely* die!" Who can reflect on these words as proceeding from a God of infinite power and of inviolable truth, and not tremble?]

3. The condition implied in that declaration—

[If there were no condition implied in the declaration, it would have been to no purpose to make known the declaration itself; since it could have no other effect than to torment men before their time. But as in the message to Nineveh, "that in forty days Nineveh should be overthrown," there was an implied condition, that, if they repented, the threatened vengeance should be withheld; so, in this case, there is an implied assurance, that the wicked, if they will repent, shall not die. And this is expressly stated in the following context[d]: so that, awful as this passage is, it is no less encouraging than it is awful; because it assures the contrite and believing sinner that he shall never perish.]

Together with this warning; we see in the text,

II. The necessity imposed on Ministers to proclaim it—

Ministers are described as watchmen, or sentinels, placed at a distance from the camp to give notice of the enemy's approach. Now this very character marks both their duty and their responsibility. But the consequences of neglect in any Minister are declared in two respects:

1. The person whom he neglects to warn will perish—

[If through the sloth or treachery of the sentinels a camp be surprised at midnight, nothing but confusion and ruin can ensue. Thus, if a person appointed to warn the wicked, neglect to do so, the wicked will continue regardless of their impending doom, till it is too late to avert it. And when the hour of vengeance is come, it will be to no purpose to say, "I was not aware of my danger; my Minister has betrayed me." No; the wicked have means of information within their own reach, independent of their Ministers; and they have secret intimations in their own consciences that they ought to repent: and therefore they must take the consequences of their own wickedness; "they must die in their iniquity." How awful is this effect of one Minister's supineness! Alas! that hundreds, and perhaps thousands, should perish eternally, when, if he had warned them faithfully, they might have been saved for ever!]

2. He

[d] ver. 14—16.

2. He himself also will be dealt with as the author of that sinner's destruction—

[As a sentinel who, by neglecting to give notice of the enemy's approach, occasioned the overthrow of the army to which he belonged, would be chargeable with all the consequences of his neglect, so will the blood of all that perish through the Minister's neglect "be required at his hand." When they shall all stand before God, he will ask of the Minister, Why didst thou not warn that man, and him, and him, and him? It will be to no purpose to say, "Lord, he was rich, and I was afraid of his displeasure;" or, "Lord, he was poor, and I overlooked him;" or, "Lord, I was so engaged in business or pleasure, that I never thought about the souls committed to my charge." No: he must answer for every soul that perishes through his means, and must sink ten-fold deeper into the bottomless abyss than the most guilty of the people whom he has neglected and betrayed.]

APPLICATION—

[After stating these reasons for Ministerial fidelity, we need make no apology for "warning the wicked from their way:" or rather, we need apologize for not using far greater plainness of speech than we have ever yet done.

Hear then, ye wicked, with solemn awe, the voice of God to you. "O thou wicked *drunkard*, thou shalt surely die!" "O thou wicked *whoremonger*, thou shalt surely die!" "O thou wicked *swearer*, or *sabbath-breaker*, thou shalt surely die!" Is there any one here that, though free from gross sins, *lives in a neglect of secret prayer*;[e] "O thou wicked man, *thou* shalt surely die!"———

But while we declare these things, we would not be unmindful of the compassion which is expressed in the very mode in which God has denounced his judgments; "O thou wicked man!" This seems to intimate, that God is grieved for the misery of the wicked, even while he declares the doom that awaits them. So would we be; and the rather, because we ourselves are involved in the same condemnation, if we do not repent and turn to God.

O then, Brethren, whether ye have committed gross sins or not, remember that ye all need to humble yourselves before God as condemned sinners: ye all need to wash in the fountain of the Redeemer's blood: ye all need to "turn from your transgressions, that so iniquity may not be your ruin." O that God may enable you to accept this warning with all thankfulness! We have striven, as it became us, to "deliver our own souls:" the Lord grant that, in thus endeavouring to save ourselves, we may be instrumental to save also those that hear us[f]!"]

[e] This may be easily extended to the *formalist*, the *hypocritical professor*, &c.

[f] 1 Tim. iv. 16.

DLXXXVI.

CHRIST THE PLANT OF RENOWN.

Ezek. xxxiv. 29. *I will raise up for them a plant of renown.*

THE names by which our blessed Lord is designated in the Scriptures are exceeding various. Every one of them illustrates some part of his character, and leads us, as it were, one step towards the knowledge of him; though, as the light of all the stars combined would give but a very faint idea of the sun, so the lustre reflected from every image in the creation conveys a very inadequate notion of the beauty, the excellency, the fulness of Christ.

That the image in the text refers to him, is clear from the whole context. God, having severely reproved the negligence of those whom he had appointed to watch over his flock[a], promises that he will raise them up a Shepherd, who shall faithfully discharge all his duties, and execute for their good the trust reposed in him[b]. This, without any further explanation, would have been sufficient to point out to us "that good Shepherd," the Lord Jesus Christ: but the subsequent verses mark the name and offices of this Shepherd in such plain terms, that there is not a possibility of doubt respecting the person to whom the prophecy immediately and exclusively relates[c]. In the text, the same person is spoken of, only under a different metaphor: in considering which, we shall notice,

I. The representation that is here given of Christ—

Christ is often spoken of by the Prophets under the figure of a branch[d], or rod, growing out of a stem[e]: and in this view he is represented as contemptible in the eyes of a blind and ungodly world[f]. But he is deservedly called, "A plant of renown,"

1. On account of his mysterious nature—

[Never did such a plant as this exist before. Never could the highest archangel have conceived it possible that such a plant should

[a] ver. 2—10. [b] ver. 11—16. [c] ver. 23, 24.
[d] Jer. xxxiii. 15. Zech. vi. 12, 13. [e] Isai. xi. 1.
[f] Isai. liii. 2.

should exist, unless God had expressly revealed it to him. Nothing in the whole creation has any resemblance to it, or could convey the smallest idea of it. This plant has two perfectly distinct natures, and each of those natures complete in all its attributes: it is both divine and human: it unites in itself the fulness of the Godhead with all the sinless infirmities of manhood. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is "God manifest in the flesh:" and a most stupendous mystery it is[g]! The manner also in which he assumed our nature was most mysterious. He was not born like other men, but formed in the womb of a pure virgin through the intervention and agency of the Holy Ghost. And in this view, "as a child born, and a son given," it was expressly declared that "his name should be called, Wonderful[h]."]

2. On account of his transcendent qualities—

[Other trees have one species of fruit, and are useful chiefly, if not entirely, in one view only. But behold this plant bears twelve manner of fruits; fruit for every season, whether of prosperity or adversity; fruit for every occasion that can possibly arise; and suited to every person who desires to partake of it[i]. Moreover, the leaves of this tree are as salubrious as its fruit[j]; and are an infallible remedy for all the maladies to which our souls are exposed. Its virtues have been proved in every age. Its fame has been spread throughout the whole universe: and the more it has been tried, the more, without one single exception, has it been valued. The tree cast into the waters of Marah, was but a faint shadow of this, which, if properly used, would heal the fountains of iniquity that diffuse their deadly poison through the whole world[k]. This branch is of yet further use to build the Temple of the Lord[l]: well then might the Prophet say of it, that it should be "excellent and glorious[l]."]

3. On account of the estimation in which he is held—

[See in what light he is viewed by his heavenly Father: "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth[m]!" See what the angels think of him: no sooner did they see him planted in the earth, than they came down from heaven to announce the glad tidings, and ascribed "Glory to God in the highest[m]." Shall I need to tell you how he is regarded by man? By those who know him not, "he is despised and rejected:" but "to them that know him, he is precious[n]." What joy was excited in Abraham's heart, when he only got a glimpse of him, two thousand years before his incarnation[o]! With what extatic fervour

[g] 1 Tim. iii. 16. [h] Isai. ix. 6. [i] Rev. xxii. 2.
[j] Exod. xv. 23—25. [k] Zech. vi. 12, 13. [l] Isai. iv. 2.
[m] Isai. xlii. 1. Prov. viii. 30. Matt. iii. 17. [l] Luke ii. 7—14.
[n] 1 Pet. ii. 7. [o] John viii. 56.

fervour did the Prophets call upon the whole creation to rejoice in the prospect of his advent[p]! When he was come, and his excellencies were more fully known, his disciples "counted all things but dung for the knowledge of him[q]," and were ready, at all times, and in any manner, to lay down their lives for him[r]. There are multitudes also in the present day, in whose eyes he is "chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely[s]." But how will they express their admiration of him in the day when "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe[t]!" In heaven too, when all that have eaten of his fruits, and felt the healing efficacy of his leaves, shall surround that "tree of life," and unite in ascribing to it their whole salvation; what "a plant of renown" will it *then* appear!]

As God has fulfilled to us this gracious promise, and raised up for us this plant of renown, let us consider,

II. Our duty towards him—

In allusion to the metaphor, of which we ought not to lose sight, it may be observed, that we should,

1. Abide under his shadow—

[Many are the storms and tempests to which we are exposed, and from which nothing but this tree can shelter us. It is planted on purpose that it may be "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land[u]." If we flee to him, we are as safe as the Israelites were in their blood-sprinkled houses, from the sword of the destroying angel[x]. When "God shall rain down fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest on the wicked[y]," we shall have no cause for fear; for "though a thousand shall fall on our side, and ten thousand at our right hand[z]," "no evil whatsoever shall befall us;" "he will cover us with his foliage; and his truth shall be our shield and buckler." Let us then draw nigh to him; and we shall experience the blessedness of the Church of old, who "sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto her taste[a]."]

2. Live upon his fruits—

[We have before observed, that every kind of fruit is to be found in him: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, peace, and whatever else we can desire, are to be obtained from him in rich abundance[b]. And every one may get access to him. We need not go up to heaven, or down to hell, or travel to a remote country: he

[p] Isai. xliv. 23.
[q] Phil. iii. 8.
[r] Acts xx. 24.
[s] Cant. v. 10, 16.
[t] 2 Thess. i. 10.
[u] Isai. xxxii. 2.
[x] Exod. xii. 21—23.
[y] Ps. xi. 6.
[z] Ps. xci. 1, 4, 7, 10.
[a] Cant. ii. 3.
[b] ver. 30.

he is nigh to us: he is in the church; he is in our closet; he is in our very hearts[c]: wherever we go, there he is, ever present with us, ever ready to supply our wants. No fiery sword prohibits our approach to him[d]: on the contrary, he invites us to come to him, to cease from "feeding upon ashes," and to take of his fruits freely[e]. None are shut out from this right. There is no wall about him, no exclusive privilege to those who live nigh to him: but "all who are afar off," whether they be old or young, rich or poor, moral or immoral, are invited to partake of all his benefits[f]. Moreover, there is no price required, as there is for the fruits of other trees: we are told to "eat abundantly[g]," and to take it all "without money and without price[h]."

Let us then accept this gracious invitation, and "eat, and live for ever[i]."]

3. Bless God for him—

[What a mercy would the fallen angels account it, if such a plant were to be raised up for them! And how thankful would they be, who are now out of the reach of this tree, if they might return to this world for a single hour with a permission to gather its fruits! Surely then we who have liberty of access to it, and especially those of us who are daily eating its fruits, should bless and adore our God for "his unspeakable gift[j]." If, only on the eve of its being planted in this world, the devout Patriarch brake forth into such exalted strains of praise and thanksgiving[k], surely we should not be silent, but should call upon "our souls, and all that is within us, to bless his holy name[l]."]

4. Commend him to others—

[The lepers who found abundance in the Syrian camp, could not forbear going to acquaint their famished countrymen with the glad tidings[m]. And shall we be backward to inform our neighbours respecting this tree, whereby all their diseases may be healed, and all their wants supplied? The moment that Andrew and Philip had discovered it, they endeavoured to bring their friends to a participation of their bliss[n]. Let us do the same. Our enjoyment of its fruits will be enhanced, rather than diminished, by a communication of them to others. Let us, I say, in compliance with the direction given us, exert ourselves to the uttermost, if peradventure we may introduce them to the knowledge of Christ, and be instrumental to the salvation of their souls[o].]

[c] Rom. x. 6—8. [d] Gen. iii. 24. [e] Isai. lv. 2.
[f] Acts ii. 39. with Rom. x. 12, 13. [g] Cant. v. 1.
[h] Isai. lv. 1. [i] ib. ver. 3. [j] 2 Cor. ix. 15.
[k] Luke i. 68, 69. [l] Ps. ciii. 1. [m] 2 Kin. vii. 9.
[n] John i. 40, 41, 43, 45. [o] Isai. xii. 4—6.

DLXXXVII.

THE DUTY OF SELF-LOTHING.

Ezek. xxxvi. 31. *Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities, and for your abominations.*

IT should seem, that the more excellent any man became, the higher thoughts he would have of his own excellence; and the more he was conformed to the will of God, the more he would be filled with self-complacency. But the very reverse of this is the truth. Men's humiliation will always increase in proportion as they know the extent of their duty, and are made sensible of their defects; and consequently, the more they advance in holiness, the more they will lament their past, and remaining, iniquities. The words of our text confirm this. They are addressed, not to persons living in wilful and deliberate sin, but to persons "cleansed from their filthiness," and possessed of "a new spirit, whereby they are enabled to walk in God's statutes:" even to them is the injunction given, to "lothe themselves for their abominations."

We shall consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

Repentance, though an universally acknowledged duty, is but little understood. It implies,

1. A calling of our evil ways to remembrance—

[However tenacious our memory may be of evils committed by others against us, we are very forgetful of the evils which we ourselves commit against God. But we should go back to the earliest periods of our life, and review the transactions which then took place: we should then prosecute our inquiries through each successive year, till our reason was expanded, and our judgment informed with respect to the nature and consequences of sin: we should advance in this way through the different stages of our existence, till we arrive at the present time. Much evil will doubtless have passed away, and left no trace behind: but much may be recalled to our minds, sufficient to shew, that the whole

whole bias of our souls has been towards wickedness, and that in proportion as our faculties of body and mind have been enlarged, we have devoted them to the service of sin and Satan.

Having brought our examination down to the present time, we should enter more deeply into the qualities even of our best actions: we should search into *the motives* from which they sprang; *the manner* in which they were performed; and *the end* at which we aimed in the performance of them: we should do this, *not with a view to find our good deeds, but "our doings that were not good;" not to furnish ourselves with grounds of self-approbation and self-complacency, but of humiliation and contrition.*]

2. A lothing of ourselves on account of them—

[The calling of our ways to remembrance is only preparatory to that more essential part of true penitence, "the lothing of ourselves on account of them." To this it must lead: if it stop short of this, it is of no avail. It is in vain that we are alarmed and terrified with a sense of our guilt; for Pharaoh[a], and Judas[b], confessed their sins under a sudden impression of fear and remorse: nor will it suffice to express a considerable degree of sorrow on account of our state; for even in Ahab's humiliation this was found[c]: we must be brought to self-lothing and self-abhorrence.

The Scriptures illustrate sin by "a dog returning to his own vomit," "and a sow that was washed wallowing in the mire[d]." It must be confessed that the former of these metaphors is most disgusting: but the more disgusting it is, the more suited is it to the occasion; since the conduct of the sinner, like that of the dog, argues an unspeakably filthy and depraved appetite. Let us apply this metaphor, not to gross sins only, but to sin in general; and then consider, that sin has been, not merely a morsel swallowed under some violent temptation, but our daily food, yea, the only thing towards which we had any real appetite; and what filthy creatures shall we then appear! What disgusting objects must we be in the sight of God; and how ought we to lothe and abhor ourselves! The latter metaphor also is a just representation of our conduct; and shews, that no terms are too degrading, no images too disgusting, to represent the filthiness of our habits, and the depravity of our hearts.

Nor let it be thought that this representation is too strong; for it accords, not only with the text, which is frequently repeated[e], but with the confessions of the most eminent saints[f], and

[a] Exod. x. 16, 17. [b] Matt. xxvii. 3—5.
[c] 1 Kin. xxi. 27. [d] 2 Pet. ii. 22. [e] Ezek. vi. 9. & xx. 43.
[f] Gen. xviii. 27. 1 Kin. xxiv. 10. Isai. vi. 5.

and justifies fully that declaration of Job, "Behold, I am vile! I repent therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes[g]."]

That this is the duty of all, without exception, will appear by considering,

II. When it is to be performed—

We must not limit this repentance to the time of conversion merely; we must, as the context shews us[h], continue it after our conversion: indeed the period subsequent to our conversion is that wherein this duty is more particularly required. For,

1. Conversion qualifies us for it—

[Till we are converted, we see but very few of our sins; because we have very defective views of the law of God. Being ignorant of the demands of the law, we must of necessity be ignorant of the multitude of our transgressions against it. Moreover we see but little of the malignity of sin; because we are unacquainted with the immense obligations which we owe to God, against whom our sins are committed. An act of unkindness in a fellow-creature, though trifling in itself, may be an exceedingly heinous offence, if done in return for many and great favours. What then must sin be, when committed against God, who has not only loaded us with temporal blessings, but has given his only dear Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to instruct us; yea, and has followed us all our days with intreaties, expostulations, promises, seeking nothing so much as our eternal welfare! This is the view of sin which conversion gives us; and it is this alone which can ever dispose and induce us to lothe ourselves.]

2. We need it as much after conversion as before—

[A converted person will certainly not indulge sin: but he still carries about him a sinful nature, that is bent to backslide from God, and that still operates to the wounding of his conscience, and the offending of his Maker. Now every sin committed in this state is incomparably more heinous than it would have been in his unrenewed state, because it is committed against more light and knowledge, more mercies and obligations, more vows and professions. Even smaller sins involve him now in deeper guilt than his more heinous trespasses before; and therefore they demand a suitable humiliation and contrition. Hence then it is evident, that, while we carry about with us a body of sin and death, we ought incessantly to lothe ourselves, and to be crying

[g] Job xl. 4. & xlii. 6. [h] "*Then.*" See ver. 25—27.

crying with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me[i]?" Indeed this is the very frame to which God's pardoning mercy is designed to bring us. And the more we abase ourselves before him, the more evidence we have of our acceptance with him[k].]

INFER,

1. How opposite to a Christian state is self-righteousness!

[If contrition be a state pleasing to God, and self-lothing be a necessary constituent of it, then, self-righteousness must be most hateful to God, and most injurious to our souls; because it necessarily leads to self-approbation and self-complacency, which are as opposite to self-lothing as darkness is to light. Would to God that this were duly considered! Men profess to repent, and yet make a righteousness of their repentance!—a manifest proof that they know not what repentance is! Know, my Brethren, that "all our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags[l]:" that our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of; and, that we must disclaim our best deeds in point of dependence, as much as the vilest sins we ever committed. We may indeed "rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience:" but we shall find cause for self-abhorrence, even in our best frames, and our holiest actions.]

2. How dear must Christ be to every true penitent!

[A certain kind and degree of repentance may arise from fear: but that which is spiritual and saving, partakes richly of love. Nothing advances it so much as a sight of the love of Christ in dying for us[m]. Now exactly as a sense of the Saviour's love causes us to lothe ourselves, so does a sense of our own vileness cause us to admire him. Let not any imagine that self-lothing will lead us to despondency: the viler we see ourselves to be, the more will Christ be exalted and magnified in our eyes. Our vileness, as well as our weakness, will only illustrate the riches of his grace, and render him unspeakably precious to our souls.]

[i] Rom. vii. 24.
[l] Isai. lxiv. 6.
[k] Ps. li. 17.
[m] Zech. xii. 10.

DLXXXVIII.

GOD'S MERCIES NOT GIVEN FOR OUR MERITS.

Ezek. xxxvi. 32. *Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.*

THERE is not any gift, whether of nature or of grace, from which the pride of man will not take occasion to exalt itself. But the design of God in his Gospel is, to counteract this propensity, and to make his creatures sensible of their obligations to him, and their entire dependence upon him. Hence, having declared, in the preceding context, what he intended to do for his Church and people, he particularly cautions them not to imagine, that he was influenced by any goodness which he saw in them; or that, after having received his blessings, they would have any thing to boast of: for to their latest hour they would have in themselves cause for nothing but shame and confusion.

From this caution the following observations naturally arise:

I. God, in imparting his blessings to us, has not respect to any good in us—

There is not in us any thing meritorious, to which he can have respect—

[Let our actions be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and every one of them will be found wanting. If we had done all that is required of us, we should still be only unprofitable servants[a]. But we have not done all; nor have we done any part as we ought: and therefore instead of having any merit whereon to found a claim of blessings from God, we have need of mercy and forgiveness for our very best actions[b].]

Nor would it consist with his honour to make our goodness the ground of dispensing his favours—

[Whatever the measure of our goodness were, if it were considered in any degree as founding a claim for the Divine blessing, or as inducing God to impart his benefits to us, it would instantly become a ground of glorying before God. The possessor of that goodness might ascribe to himself some portion of the honour, instead of giving the glory of his salvation to God

[a] Luke xvii. 10. [b] Isai. lxiv. 6.

God alone. But this would be to subvert the whole design of the Gospel, which is, to exclude boasting[c], and not to give God's own glory to another.]

Experience alone sufficiently shews that God is influenced by no such motive—

[If God had respect to any thing that is good in us, the most moral people would always be stirred up to embrace the Gospel, and the most profligate be left to reject it. But this is by no means the case: yea, the very reverse is more generally true; that "publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom, before the more decent Scribes, or self-righteous Pharisees[d]." God is indeed sometimes said to do things for the sake of Abraham, David, and others: but it was not for their righteousness' sake, *considered as meritorious*, that God vouchsafed blessings to them or their posterity; but either to testify his love to obedience, or to manifest the immutability of his counsel[e].]

The text goes yet further, and shews that,

II. There is in us nothing which is not a ground rather for shame and confusion—

Doubtless the Jews were a peculiarly "stiff-necked people:" yet, if we have not the same sins to deplore, we have enough to justify the application of this passage to ourselves.

The sins of our unregenerate state may well fill us with confusion—

[Time may efface many things from our remembrance; but it cannot alter the nature of them, or blot them out of the book of God. Our sins are all in his sight, as if they were transacted yesterday: and whatever degree of malignity they had formerly, that they retain at this moment: and consequently we should feel on their account all the shame, and sorrow and confusion that they either did occasion, or ought to have occasioned, at the time they were committed. Yea, the whole mass of evil that ever passed through our minds ought to lie with a weight upon our consciences, so far at least as to produce an abiding sense of our extreme sinfulness.]

The infirmities of our regenerate state also should humble us in the dust before God—

[Who is not conscious of innumerable evils working in his heart? Who does not at some time feel the workings of pride, anger, worldliness, impurity, and various other corruptions? Who does not feel that *these are properly* "*his own ways*," and that

[c] Rom. iii. 27. See also Ezek. xxxvi. 21—23.
[d] Matt. xxi. 31. [e] Deut. vii. 6—8. & ix. 4—6.

that the exercise of contrary dispositions is the fruit of Divine grace?

But let us take the best actions of our lives, and the holiest dispositions of our hearts: what are our prayers and our praises, when compared with the importance of the blessings we have received, or that we desire at God's hands? What is our repentance, when compared with the number and heinousness of our transgressions? What is our trust in God? What our love to the blessed Saviour? What our zeal in his service? Do they bear any proportion to the occasions that call for them? We know that a godly person would be utterly ashamed of such services as a mere formalist makes the ground of his boast and confidence: and would not a perfect Being, if sent down to serve his God on earth, lothe himself, if he were to render no better services than ours? Surely then we ought to blush and be confounded before God, not only for the remains of evil that are within us, but for the very best actions we have ever performed.]

The emphatic manner in which these things are delivered, leads us to notice,

III. The importance of being reminded of these things, and of having them deeply fixed in our hearts—

We are apt to take credit to ourselves, and to think ourselves as high in God's estimation as we are in our own. But God would have us know, that there is no just ground for our vain conceit: it is even with considerable indignation that he reminds us of it in the words before us. We need to be well instructed in this matter,

1. That we may be led to humility—

[The knowledge of ourselves is indispensably necessary to the attainment of humility: but we must be ignorant indeed of ourselves, if we imagine that there either is, or can be, any thing in us to merit the Divine favour. The truth is, that no words can adequately express the unparalleled deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness, of our hearts[f]. If we know any thing of ourselves, we cannot but lothe and "abhor ourselves, as Job did, in dust and ashes[g]." And we need to have our extreme vileness and baseness frequently set before us, in order that we may know what we are, and "not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think[h]."]

2. That

[f] Jer. xvii. 9. [g] Job xlii. 6. [h] Rom. xii. 3.

2. That we may be excited to thankfulness—

[While we entertain the idea of having purchased, as it were, or merited the blessings we enjoy, we cannot possibly feel any lively gratitude for them in our hearts: instead of admiring the goodness of our God, we shall be ready to think hardly of him, if at any time his bounties are withdrawn from us. But let us once be convinced of our deep depravity, and we shall wonder that we have not long since been made monuments of Divine vengeance. It will then appear no small mercy that we are on praying ground; that we have a covenant-God to flee unto; and that there is a Mediator, through whom we may approach him with an assurance of acceptance. Yes; these things, which are so little regarded by the generality, will make our hearts to overflow with gratitude, and our tongues to sing aloud for joy.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us concede to God the liberty of dispensing his favours according to his own sovereign will—

[To dispute this is *needless*; for he will not ask our permission[l], nor consult our inclination; but "will have mercy on whom he will have mercy[k]" ——— Moreover, it is *ruinous*; for we cannot hope to participate his blessings, if we will not condescend to accept them as they are offered. We must "buy them" indeed, as the Scripture speaks; but it must be "without money and without price[l]." Let us then acknowledge God's right to "do what he will with his own[m];" and abase ourselves before him, as "less than the least of all his mercies[n]."]

2. Let us be thankful that, however unworthy we are, there is a Saviour whose worthiness we may plead before him—

[Though God will not do any thing for *our* sake, yet he will for his dear Son's sake. There is nothing that he will refuse us, if we go to him in the name of Jesus Christ[o]. Nor will our unworthiness be any bar to our acceptance with him. On the contrary, the more we humble and abase ourselves, the more ready will he be to accept and bless us.]

[l] Job xxxiii. 3. [k] Rom. ix. 18. [l] Isai. lv. 1.
[m] Matt. xx. 15. [n] Gen. xxxii. 10.
[o] John xiv. 13, 14. See a pattern for prayer; Dan. ix. 17—19.

DLXXXIX.

UNIVERSAL RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Ezek. xxxvii. 1—6. *The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of a valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord.*

WHILST the Jews at large, and the generality of Christians also, believe that the dispersed of Israel will one day be restored to their own land, there is an assured expectation, both amongst the one and the other, that the Messiah will in due time reign over the face of the whole earth. But, whilst this blessed event is expected by all, there lurks in the minds of the generality a persuasion, that in the present state of the Jews their conversion to Christ is impracticable; and that, whenever it shall be effected, it will be by some miraculous interposition, like that which took place at their deliverance from Egypt: and hence all attempts to convert them to Christianity are thought nugatory at least, if not presumptuous. In opposition to these discouraging apprehensions, which would paralyze all exertions in their behalf, I have selected this portion of Holy Writ, which meets the objections in the fullest possible manner, and shews, beyond all doubt, that we are bound to use the means which God has appointed for their conversion, and that in the diligent use of those means we may reasonably hope for God's blessing on our labours.

In the preceding chapter are plain and express promises relative to the restoration and conversion of the Jews. In the chapter before us the same subject is continued in an emblematic form. The Jews in Babylon

Babylon despaired of ever being restored to their native land. To counteract these desponding fears, there was given to the prophet Ezekiel a vision, in which the extreme improbability of such an event is acknowledged, whilst the certainty of it is expressly declared. And, lest the import of the vision should be mistaken, it is explained by God himself, and the event predicted in it is foretold in plain and direct terms: "Son of man, these bones are the whole House of Israel: Behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord[a]."

We cannot but admire the goodness and condescension of God, in so accommodating himself to the weaknesses and wants of men. His people were slow of heart to understand his word; and therefore he "gave them line upon line, and precept upon precept," and exhibited truth to them under every form, if so be they might be able to receive it at last, and to obtain the blessings which he held forth to them in his Gospel.

The restoration promised in the chapter before us does not merely relate to the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon. To that indeed is its primary reference; but it manifestly has respect to a recovery from their present state of dispersion, and to a spiritual deliverance from their bondage to sin and Satan: for, not only are the expressions too strong to be confined to a mere temporal deliverance, but the emblem mentioned in the subsequent part of this chapter, of uniting two sticks in the prophet's hand, shews that the whole

[a] ver. 11—14.

whole is to be accomplished, when all the tribes of Israel, as well those which were carried captive to Assyria as those of Judah and Benjamin, shall be re-united under one head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That this period is yet future, you cannot doubt, when you hear the words of God to the prophet: "Son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the Children of Israel his companions. Then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the House of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the Children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one King shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all..... And David my servant shall be king over them; and they shall have one Shepherd[b]." These things have never yet been fulfilled; but they shall be fulfilled in their season. What though the Jews be like dry bones scattered over the face of the whole earth? Shall any word that God has spoken respecting them fall to the ground? No: the scattered bones shall be re-united, each to its kindred bone, and they shall rise up an exceeding great army, as the Lord has said.

In explanation of this vision, I will endeavour to set before you,

I. The present state of the Jews;

II. Our duty towards them; and

III. Our encouragement to perform it.

Let us consider, First, The present state of the Jews—

Certainly nothing can be well conceived more unpromising

[b] ver. 16—25.

promising than this. The obstacles to their conversion do indeed appear almost insurmountable. One most formidable barrier in their way is, *the extraordinary blindness and hardness of their hearts.* From the very beginning they were, as Moses himself tells them, a stiff-necked people: and their whole history is one continued confirmation of the truth of his assertion; insomuch that any one who is conversant with the Sacred Records, but unacquainted with the plague of his own heart, would be ready to imagine, that their very blood had received a deeper taint than that of others. Certainly we should have scarcely supposed it possible that human nature should be so corrupt, as they have shewn it to be. We should never have conceived that persons who had witnessed all the wonders which were wrought in their behalf in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, should be so murmuring, so rebellious, so atheistical as they were during their forty years' continuance in the wilderness; and indeed, with the exception of some occasional and partial reformations, even till their final dispersion by the Romans. It really appears incredible, that, with the holy Scriptures in their hands, and with the life and miracles of our blessed Lord exhibited before their eyes, they could evince such malignant dispositions towards him, and with such deliberate cruelty imbrue their hands in his blood. Yet such is their state at this hour, that I can have no doubt but that they would reject him again with all the same virulence as before, if he were again to descend from heaven, and to place himself within the reach of their power. His meek and holy conduct would not be sufficient to disarm their malice; nor could all his benevolent miracles conciliate their regard: they would still, as before, cry, "Away with him! crucify him, crucify him!" The same veil is upon their hearts at this day as there was then: and, as far as they can, they actually repeat all the iniquities of their fathers, sanctioning and approving all which they did towards him, and in their hearts transacting it afresh. Such being almost universally the

the predominant features of their minds, we must acknowledge, that their restoration to life is as improbable as any event that can be contemplated. But whilst I say this, let it not be thought that I mean to cast any uncharitable reflections upon them, or needlessly to asperse their character: for I well know that by nature they are no worse than others. They labour under peculiar disadvantages. From their earliest infancy they are filled with prejudice against the religion of Jesus: they hear him designated by the most opprobrious titles; and are taught to regard him as a vile impostor. This constitutes the chief difference between them, and multitudes who bear the Christian name: ungodly Christians are as averse to real piety as they; but having been taught to reverence the name of Christ, they can hear of it without disgust; whilst the Jews who have been educated in the most envenomed hatred of it, spurn at it with indignation and abhorrence; and consequently, are proportionably hardened against all his overtures of love and mercy.

Another obstacle in their way is *the contempt in which they are held.* It had been foretold by Moses concerning them, that they should "become an astonishment and a proverb, and a bye-word among all nations[c];" and such they have been now ever since their dispersion by the Romans. There is not a quarter of the globe where this prediction is not verified. Mahometans and Heathens of every description pour contempt upon them, and load them with all manner of indignities. Nor have Christians been at all more kindly disposed towards them: on the contrary, we have been foremost in executing upon them the Divine vengeance, just as if our religion, instead of prescribing acts of mercy and love, had dictated nothing but cruelty and oppression. To this hour, the very name of a Jew is amongst us a term of reproach, a symbol of every thing that is odious and contemptible. And what is the natural effect of this? Can we wonder that it should excite resentment in their

[c] Deut. xxviii. 37.

their breasts? Has it not a necessary tendency to embitter them against us, and to make them detest the principles we profess? What can they think of Christianity, when they see such conduct universally practised by its professors? We complain of their blindness and obduracy; but can we wonder at their state, when we ourselves have done, and are yet continually doing, so much to produce it? And what effect has it on ourselves, but to weaken any kind dispositions which may be cherished in the hearts of a few towards them, and to make us despair of ever effecting any thing in their behalf? This effect, I say, it does produce: for, whilst we make extensive efforts for the conversion and salvation of the Heathen, we pass by the Jew with utter disdain, and deride as visionary all endeavours for his welfare. If we saw but a beast fallen into a pit, our bowels of compassion would move towards him, and we should make some efforts for his deliverance: but we behold millions of Jews perishing in their sins, and we never sigh over their lamentable condition, nor use any means for the salvation of their souls. They are not allowed even the contingent benefits of social intercourse with us: the wall of partition which God has broken down in his Gospel, is built up by us; as if by general consent they were proscribed, and debarred all access to the light that we enjoy. Their fathers, in the Apostolic age, laboured and died for us, when we were sunk in the depths of sin and misery: but we will not stretch out a hand for them, or point them to the Rock, on which they may be saved from the overwhelming surge. Thus they are left to famish, whilst the heavenly manna lies around our tents; and they are immured in darkness, whilst we are enjoying all the blessings of the noon-day sun. Say then, Whether this be not a formidable barrier in their way, so as to render their access to the true Messiah beyond measure difficult?

But a yet further obstacle to their conversion arises from *the efforts which they themselves use to*

prevent the introduction of Christianity among them. The Rulers of their Church exercise authority over them with a strong hand: and the first appearance among them of an inclination to embrace the Gospel of Christ is checked with great severity. Every species of threatening is used to intimidate those who have begun to ask the way to Zion, and to deter them from prosecuting their inquiries: and, if a person yield to his convictions, and embrace the Gospel, he is instantly loaded with all the odium that can be heaped upon him: every kind of employment is withheld from him; and he would be left to perish with hunger, if he were not aided by those whose principles he has embraced. An apprehension of those evils deters vast multitudes from free inquiry; and constrains not a few to stifle their convictions, because they cannot prevail on themselves to sacrifice their all for Christ.

Such being the present state of the Jews, it may well be asked, "*Can* these bones live?" Can it be hoped that the feeble efforts which we are using should succeed? If, when in Babylon, they despaired, saying, "Our bones are dried; our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts;" may they not with far greater propriety adopt the same language now? and may not we regard all attempts for their conversion as altogether hopeless, even as hopeless as the resuscitation of dry bones, that have been for ages crumbled into dust?

Yet hopeless as their state appears, we should not be discouraged from performing,

II. Our duty towards them—

The command which God gave to the prophet in my text was *not personal* to him, *but general* to all who are partakers of superior light and liberty. The whole was not a real transaction, but a vision, intended for the instruction of the Church of God in all ages, and especially for those who should be alive at the period destined for the accomplishment of the prophecy. We may consider therefore the directions

here

here given as applicable to ourselves, and as comprising our duty towards the House of Israel. It consists in these two things, *The communicating of instruction to them*, and *The praying unto God for them.*

We should, as far as lies in our power, *communicate instruction to them.* The word "prophecy" does not necessarily import an utterance of predictions; it is often used for the conveying of instruction in the name of God: and this is what we are bound to do to the Jewish people, each of us according to the abilities we possess, and the opportunities that are afforded us. We are not all called to exercise the Ministerial office: but we are to impart in conversation the knowledge we have received. No Christian whatever is to put his light under a bushel or a bed, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to those who are within the sphere of its influence. If we have but one talent, we are to use it for the honour of our God, and the benefit of our fellow-creatures.

But here it is to be regretted, that the generality of Christians are themselves destitute of the information which they are called upon to communicate. Nor is this true of the laity only: even those who bear the Ministerial office are by no means so well instructed in the points at issue between the Jews and us, as to be competent to the task of entering into controversy with the more learned Jews. Even those Ministers who have somewhat of a deeper insight into the mysteries of the Gospel, are for the most part but ill furnished with that species of knowledge which qualifies them for instructing the Jews. They are not aware of the principal objections of the Jews to Christianity, nor of the answers which ought to be given to them. Even the peculiar excellencies of the Christian system, as contradistinguished from Judaism, are not so familiar to them as they ought to be. With Heathens they can argue, and with different sects of Christians they can maintain their stand: but, so utterly have they disregarded and despised the Jew, that they have thought it not worth their while to furnish themselves with knowledge suited to

his case. This is greatly to the shame of Christians in general, and of Christian Ministers in particular. Nor does it offer any just excuse for our continuing to neglect the Jews, since we ought instantly to make ourselves acquainted with all that is necessary for the conviction of our Jewish Brother; and in the mean time should procure for him, from others, the instruction which we ourselves are unable to impart. This is what we should do, if we saw a brother perishing of wounds that had been inflicted on him: we should not account our want of medical skill as any reason for neglecting his case; but we should endeavour to procure for him from others the aid he stood in need of. And this is what we should do for his soul, procuring for him such books as are suited to his capacity, and bringing him into contact with such persons as are better qualified than ourselves to enlighten and instruct his soul.

To withhold these efforts under an idea that God will convert them without the instrumentality of man, is to belie our consciences, and to deceive our own souls. Such an excuse is nothing but a veil to cover our own supineness. Where has God told us that he will convert them without means? He did not do so even on the day of Pentecost. He has commanded that "his Gospel should be preached in all the world, to every creature." Where has he made them an exception? This I say then, that our duty towards them is, to use all possible means for the illumination of their minds, and for the conversion of their souls to the faith of Christ.

But it is our duty at the same time to *pray for them*. The prophet was not only to prophesy to the dry bones, but to "say, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath! (O thou eternal Spirit!) and breathe upon these slain, that they may live[d]." Whoever may attempt to convey instruction, it will be attended with little benefit, if God do not accompany the word with power from on high. "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is

[d] ver. 9.

is God alone that can give the increase." If we set about any thing in our strength, and expect any thing from the means, without looking directly to God in and through the means, we shall be rebuked, and left without success; just as Elisha was, when he expected his staff to raise to life the widow's child[e]. Like the prophet in our text, we are to pray for the influences of the Holy Spirit to give efficacy to the word. To this effect we are taught by God himself; "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth[f]." If we conscientiously combine our personal exertions with fervent prayer, there is not any thing which we may not hope for. Wonderful is the efficacy of fervent and believing prayer: and, if we employ it diligently in behalf of the Jews, desperate as their condition to all appearance is, it shall prevail, to the bringing forth of their souls from the prison in which they are immured, and for the introducing of them into the light and liberty of God's dear children.

True it is, we may without any saving influences of the Spirit effect a previous work, like that of bringing together the kindred bones, and causing the flesh and skin to come upon them: but God alone can breathe life into them. We may bring them possibly to "a form of godliness; but God alone can give the power:" and it is only when our "word comes to men in demonstration of the Spirit," that it ever proves "the power of God to the salvation" of their souls.

Such is our duty towards them: and that we may not draw back from it through despondency, let us consider,

III. Our encouragement to perform it—

We have the express promise of God to render it effectual. What can we want more? The promise is repeated

[e] 2 Kin. iv. 29—31. [f] Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

repeated again and again; "Ye *shall* live;" "Ye *shall* live;" "I will bring you up out of your graves, and ye *shall* live[s]." And is not God able to do it? Look at the heavens and the earth: Hath he created all these out of nothing? hath he spoken them into existence by the word of his mouth, and is he not able to effect the conversion of the Jews? Has he declared that he will raise the dead at the last day, and bring into judgment every Child of man; and cannot he, who shall accomplish that in its season, effect this also at the appointed time? True, the bones are, as he has said, "dry, very dry:" but they are not beyond the reach of his power. What if the resuscitation of them be "marvellous in our eyes, must it therefore be marvellous in God's eyes?" (Zech. viii. 6.) His word in the mouth of Jews has been effectual for the conversion of the Gentiles; and that same word in the mouth of Gentiles shall be effectual for the conversion of the Jews: for "his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Tell me, Did he not bring out his people from Egypt at the appointed time? Yes, "at the self-same hour did he bring them forth, with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm." In like manner he delivered them also in due season from Babylon, according to his word: and these are sure pledges, that he will in due season fulfil all his promises towards them, and not suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail.

In dependence on his promise then, we should address ourselves to the work assigned us. We should go forth feeling the utter hopelessness of our task, and say, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" The greater the difficulty appears, the more should we hold fast our confidence in God, with whom nothing is impossible. We should go, as it were, into the midst of that vast theatre, and lift up our voice without either distrust or fear. If the means already used have proved ineffectual, we should, like Elisha, exert

[s] ver. 5, 6, 12, 14.

exert ourselves with the more earnestness, and labour more fervently in prayer with God for his blessing on our endeavours. In order to raise the son of the Shunamite, he cried mightily to the Lord, and went in and stretched himself upon the child, applying his mouth, his eyes, his hands, to the mouth, the eyes, the hands of the child[h]: and thus should we go in to our Jewish Brethren: we should address ourselves to the work in the length and breadth of all our powers, accommodating ourselves to the measure and capacity of every individual amongst them, and labouring in every possible way to inspire them with love to Christ: and, if we see as yet but little effect, (as was at first the case with that holy prophet) let us "not despise the day of small things," but let us look upon the smallest success as an earnest of greater things, as the first-fruits before the harvest, and as the drop before the shower. Two things in particular I wish you to notice in the text: the one is, that GOD WROUGHT NOTHING TILL THE PROPHET USED THE APPOINTED MEANS; and the other is, that HE WROUGHT EFFECTUALLY AS SOON AS THE MEANS WERE USED. This is twice noticed by the prophet in the verses following my text: So I prophesied as I was commanded; and *as I prophesied, the bones came together:*" and again, "*So I prophesied as he commanded me; and the breath came into them, and they lived*[i]." Let this, I pray you, sink down into your ears: only let this be understood, and felt, and acted upon; and I shall have gained a point of the utmost importance to the Jewish cause: for, however inadequate to the end our efforts be, God requires us to put them forth; and when they are put forth in humility and faith, he will bless them to the desired end. To EXPECT THE BLESSING WITHOUT USING THE MEANS, OR TO DESPAIR OF SUCCESS IN THE USE OF THEM, IS EQUALLY WRONG. What he has commanded, we must do: and what he has promised, we must expect. Be the difficulties ever so great, we must not stagger at the promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving

[h] 2 Kin. iv. 33—35. [i] ver. 7, 10.

giving glory to God. Our blessed Lord, when Mary imagined that her brother was gone beyond a possibility of recovery, said to her, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" so to you I say, Be not discouraged by thinking how long our brother has been dead, or how corrupt he is; but expect assuredly, that at the sound of Jesus' voice he shall rise out of his grave and come forth to life.

Permit me now to address myself to you in a more particular manner: and first, *To those whose exertions are paralyzed by despondency.*

I object not to a full consideration of all the difficulties that obstruct the conversion of the Jews. I wish them to be viewed in their utmost extent: but then they should be viewed, not as grounds for relaxing our efforts, but as motives to the most strenuous exertion. With the generality, these desponding fears are only excuses for their own supineness: they have no compassion for their perishing fellow-creatures, no zeal for the honour of their God, and therefore they cry, "A lion is in the way." But this is a very unworthy recompence for all the exertions which the Jews of former ages made for us. What if they had said respecting the Gentiles, "They are bowing down to stocks and stones, and it is in vain to attempt their conversion?" we should have continued in our ignorance and guilt to the present hour. It was by their unremitting labours that the Gospel was spread; and to them we owe all the light and peace that we at this moment enjoy. Let us then imitate them: let us employ our talents and our influence in their service: let us combine together for the purpose of promoting their welfare more extensively than we could do by individual exertion: and whilst we go forward in dependence on the promises of our God, let us remember, that "what he has promised, he is able also to perform."

As for the idea that the Lord's time is not come, who is authorized to declare that? The great events that are going forward in the world give us reason to think

think that the time is come, or at least is very near at hand. The prophecies themselves, in the judgment of many wise and sober interpreters, appear to point to the present times, as the season for their approaching accomplishment. And certainly the attention now paid to the subject by the Christian world, and the success that has hitherto attended their efforts, are encouraging circumstances to confirm our hopes, and stimulate our exertions. We may add too, that the zeal that has been manifested of late for the universal diffusion of the holy Scriptures, and for the conversion of the Heathen, is a call from God to the Christian world, to consider the wants of his antient people; and the general expectation of the Jews at this time, that their Messiah will soon appear, is a still further call to us to point out the Saviour to them. Nor can I pass by without notice two most astonishing events; one of which has lately occurred in a foreign country, and the other is at this moment arising in our own. In Russia, God has raised up a friend for his people, another Cyrus, in the Head of that vast empire; who has assigned one, if not more places in his dominions, where the Jews who shall embrace Christianity may find a safe asylum, and enjoy all necessary means of providing for themselves, agreeably to their former habits. In our own land, an unprecedented concern begins to manifest itself in behalf of all the nations of the earth who are lying in darkness and the shadow of death. The duty of sending forth Missionaries to instruct them, is now publickly acknowledged by all our Governors in Church and State; and in a short time will the whole community, from the highest to the lowest, be invited to unite in this blessed work[1]. And in this ebullition of religious zeal, can we suppose that the Jew shall be forgotten? Shall those to whom we ourselves are indebted for all the light that we enjoy, be overlooked? Will it not be remembered, that our blessed Lord and Saviour was a Jew; and that it is a Jew who is at this moment interceding for us at the right hand of God? Shall not our obligations to him and his Apostles

[1] In the Prince Regent's Letter, read in all the Churches through the kingdom.

Apostles be requited by a due attention to those who were the first in his estimation, and are yet "beloved by him for their fathers' sakes?" We must on no account overlook them: we must consider them as comprehended in the general commission: and let us hope that there will be a simultaneous effort through the land, to carry into effect the pious and benevolent designs of our Governors.

An erroneous idea has obtained, that because it is said by St. Paul, "that blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in[k]," the great harvest of the Gentiles must be reaped before the sickle is put to the Jewish field. But this is directly contrary to what the same Apostle says in the very same chapter, where he represents "the fulness of the Jews as being the riches of the Gentiles[l]." It is the commencement, and not the completion, of the in-gathering of the Gentiles, that marks the season for the conversion of the Jews; and therefore the stir which there is at this moment amongst the Gentile world, is, amongst other signs of the times, a proof, that the time for the conversion of the Jews is near at hand. Away then with all desponding fears; and to every obstruction that presents itself in your way, say, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain[m]."

Next, let me address myself *to those who desire to be accomplishing this great work.* You will reasonably ask, What shall we do in order to advance this blessed cause? To this I answer, Be much in prayer to God for them. Were the Christian world more earnest in prayer to God for the restoration and salvation of his people, I feel no doubt but that God would arise and have mercy upon Zion, and that a great work would speedily be wrought among them. When the angel interceded for Jerusalem, saying, "O Lord God, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?" Jehovah, we are told, answered him with good and comfortable words[n]. And, if a spirit of intercession for

[k] Rom. xi. 25. [l] Rom. xi. 12. [m] Zech. iv. 6, 7.
[n] Zech. i. 12, 13.

for them prevailed amongst us, God would answer, not by good and comfortable words only, but by great and powerful acts, even by the displays of his pardoning grace, and the manifestations of his long-suspended love. United prayer brought Peter out of his prison: and united prayer would bring the Jews also out of their graves; and they should arise before us "an exceeding great army."

Still however, as human means also are to be used, I would say, Form yourselves into Societies and Associations for the advancement of this work. Much may be done by united and systematic exertion, which cannot possibly be done without it: funds will be raised; and many will be stirred up to join with you, who would neither have inclination nor ability to do much in a way of solitary effort: and, if God has given to any one a talent of wealth or influence, let him improve it to the uttermost. It is scarcely to be conceived how much a single individual may effect, provided he set himself diligently to the work. God has said he will "bring his people one of a city and two of a family," yea, that "he will bring them to Zion one by one." And if only *one* be brought from darkness unto light, and from death to life, it is worth all our efforts: for one single soul is of greater value than the whole world. Let us up then, and be doing; for the Lord is with us: and if we see not immediately all the effect we could wish, we have the satisfaction of knowing that God approves of the desire, and that, like David, we are gathering stones which our successors shall erect into a temple of the Lord.

But let it not content us to proselyte the Jews to mere nominal Christianity. It is to no purpose to bring their bones together, and cover them with flesh, unless their souls be made alive to God, and they become living members of Christ's mystical body. In the close of the chapter from whence our text is taken, God informs us what is to characterize the conversion of the Jews to Christ: "David, my servant, (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ,)

Christ,) shall be King over them; and they shall all have one Shepherd: my servant David shall be their Prince for ever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and my tabernacle also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people[o]." Yes, this is vital Christianity; this is the only true religion that can benefit *us;* and therefore it is that to which we must endeavour to convert *them.* I ask of you, my Brethren, What is it that comforts you, but a view of the everlasting covenant, "ordered in all things and sure?" What is it that enables you to live above the things of time and sense, and to look forward with joy to the eternal world; what is it, I say, but a hope, that you stand in this near relation to a reconciled God, and a persuasion, that that Saviour, whose you are and whom you serve, will bruise Satan under your feet, and make you more than conquerors over all your enemies? Bear this in mind then, I pray you, in all your conversations with Jews, and in all your efforts for their good. Aim at nothing short of this. To convince them by argument is nothing, unless you bring them to a life of faith upon the Son of God, and to a life of entire devotedness to his service. This you must first experience in your own souls, else you can never hope to effect it in theirs. Let them see in you how truly blessed a life of faith is; and what a sanctifying efficacy it has on your hearts and lives. Let them see, that it is not a merely speculative opinion about the Lord Jesus Christ, to which you would convert them, but to the enjoyment of his love, to a participation of his image, to a possession of his glory. In a word, be yourselves among them as living epistles of Christ, that in you they may read the excellency of his salvation: then may you hope to prevail with them; and that they will gladly unite themselves to you, when they shall see that God is with you of a truth.

[o] ver. 24—27.

DXC.

THE HEBREW YOUTHS IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

Dan. iii. 28. *Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.*

A BRIGHTER example of fidelity to God than that before us is not to be found in all the records of antiquity. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, full of pride and vain-glory, determined to erect an image of gold that should be worshipped as a god. The image was above thirty yards in height, and three in breadth; and all covered over with plates of solid gold. The expense of making this image must have been immense; and it puts to shame the worshippers of Jehovah, who grudge to expend their money for the promotion of his glory. The image being erected, the chief men in all the provinces of the empire were summoned to attend at the dedication of it, and, at a given signal, to bow down and worship it. The three Hebrew youths mentioned in our text, having been set over different provinces, were necessitated to be present at the ceremony; but, being convinced of the sinfulness of idolatry, they would not themselves be guilty of it. As far as they could conscientiously obey their king, they would: but where there remained no alternative but to disobey him, or to offend their God, they determined to "obey God rather than man."

To bring their history more fully under our view, let us notice,

I. Their fidelity—

They were certainly under great temptation to comply with the wishes of the king—

[They were under far different circumstances from the rest of the Governors that were assembled on this occasion. They were not merely subjects, but captives, who were entirely at the king's mercy. They were also under peculiar obligations to the king, who had educated them at his own expense, and had even invested

invested them with authority over whole provinces of his native subjects. These considerations were calculated to operate strongly on their minds, and to render them somewhat less scrupulous than they would otherwise have been about a single infringement of the Divine law. A sense of duty to their king, and of gratitude to their benefactor, might seem to justify a small deviation from the stricter path of duty. They might possibly compare the act required of them with the conduct of the whole Jewish nation, both priests and people: the Jews had erected idols of their own, and, of their own free-will, had worshipped them in preference to Jehovah: but these youths were brought into the situation against their will, and in their own minds intended no disrespect to the God of heaven. Were they to act as their own priests and people had done, they would doubtless be highly criminal; but could there then be any great harm in merely bowing their heads, as an act of obedience to their prince? Moreover, when every governor in the empire complied with the edict, why should *they* refuse; more especially since their refusal would subject them to the most cruel death, and rob them of all opportunity of benefiting their respective provinces in future?

They who know how the mind and conscience are apt to be biassed by such reasonings as these, will see, that they must of necessity present a very formidable obstacle to the preservation of integrity under such circumstances.]

But they manfully withstood the royal edict—

[They would not for a moment confer with flesh and blood. No regard to their own ease or safety, no, nor to their eventual usefulness in the world, could induce them to swerve from the plain path of duty. They were offered by the king to re-consider their determination: but their minds were made up, rather to suffer any thing, than to sin against their God. The king had exultingly said, "Who is that God who shall deliver you out of my hand?" But they told him, that their God was able, yea moreover, that he *would* deliver them out of his hand: but that, whether he would or not, they were fixed in their purpose, never to violate their conscience in bowing down to this golden idol[a].

In the midst of all this firmness, we observe not one indecorous expression; no invectives, no complaints, but simply a declaration of their affiance in God, and of their determination never to sin against him.]

How God appreciated their fidelity, we may judge from,

II. Their recompence—

The judgment threatened was, that they should be

[a] Dan. iii. 16—18.

be cast into a burning fiery furnace: and the command was instantly given, that it should be executed upon them. But behold how God interposed for them!

1. Whilst it was executing—

[The mightiest men in all the army were selected to execute this judgment, and to cast the offenders into the furnace, now heated seven times more than usual for their reception. The youths were bound in their cloaths, that nothing belonging to them might be preserved; and they were cast into the furnace, according to the king's commandment. But, behold! the flames burst forth, and consumed every one of the executioners. This, taken in connexion with the mercy vouchsafed to these faithful youths, marked indisputably the indignation of God against the persecutors, and his approbation of those who had braved death for his sake.

Had the Hebrews died, this destruction of the soldiers would have appeared an accident: but as God appeared, during the execution, to punish his enemies, so he appeared still more visibly in behalf of his friends.]

2. After it was executed—

[The youths fell down bound into the midst of the fire: but the fire had no power to hurt them. It burned the bands by which they were tied, so that, being loosed, they could walk about; but it could not so much as singe a hair of their heads, or incommode them in the least: they could breathe, and walk, and converse as easily as in the open air. Behold too, now "one like unto a Son of God," "an angel," (who, I doubt not, was "the Angel of the Covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ, who had often assumed the form of an angel before,) came into the furnace, and walked with them. This Nebuchadnezzar and his courtiers saw, and were beyond measure astonished at it. And how different now were the feelings of the oppressed and their oppressors! The oppressed had such communion with their Lord as they had never enjoyed before, such as was a foretaste of heaven itself: but their oppressors were filled with shame and confusion of face.

Still further did God appear for his servants,]

3. After it was reversed—

[The king himself, who had sent them into the furnace, came to call them thence; and was constrained, in the presence of all his people, to commend their constancy, and to acknowledge the supreme dominion and power of the God of Israel. On examination of the persons of these youths, it was found, that not so much as the smell of fire had passed on them. The fire that had consumed their bands, and destroyed their persecutors, had had no power at all over them; so that the king, who had just before

before persecuted unto death the adherents of Jehovah, now forbade, under the severest penalties, that a single word should be spoken against him.

What a triumph was here; and how gloriously attested! and what a report must now be carried into all the provinces of the empire, by those who had been summoned to attend the ceremony!

But further, these very Hebrews were not only restored to their respective governments, but were promoted to yet higher honours, as a recompence of their fidelity to God. And how they have since been rewarded in a better world, no tongue can express, no human imagination can conceive.]

Amongst the numerous and important REFLECTIONS which this subject suggests, consider,

1. What a mercy it is that we enjoy civil and religious liberty!

[We have no power over us to make such cruel edicts: we are not subject to the decrees of a capricious tyrant: we all can worship God according to our conscience, without restraint. There are, it is true, some small sacrifices made by those who choose to dissent from the established mode of worship; but they are small indeed, and required only with a view to the welfare of the State: they are such as no man who is of a spiritual and heavenly mind feels in the least burthensome. In fact, there is no sacrifice at all, except of a negative kind: all are at liberty to serve God in their own way: the infidel Socinian, and the idolatrous Papist, are as free to follow the dictates of their conscience, as the servant and worshipper of our Incarnate God. Let us be thankful for this inestimable privilege. It is not universally so even in what is called the Christian world: there is yet in existence the Popish Inquisition, which is little else than a repetition of Nebuchadnezzar's edict; and which shews us, how necessary those very tests are, to which we have before alluded: for, were the Papists once to regain the ascendant in this country, we should yet again be subjected to all the bloody edicts of former days. O let us bless our God, that the rights of conscience are respected amongst us, and that, in relation to the object or manner of our worship, we are left to stand or fall to our own Master!]

2. What a mercy it is, if we are under the influence of Divine grace—

[The whole mass of the Babylonish courtiers, being under no divine influence, complied at once with the order that was issued. So it is with men amongst ourselves. Whatever has the sanction of the great, whether it be good or bad, is followed; and no one dares to stem the torrent of iniquity which overflows the land. But men who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, will

will "not be conformed to this present evil world:" on the contrary, "they are transformed in the renewing of their minds, and they prove in their conduct what is the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God." What the principle is by which they are actuated, may be seen in the history before us: "By faith it was, that these pious youths were enabled to quench the violence of fire[b]." And if faith was so powerful under that dispensation, when the object of faith was so indistinctly and partially revealed, what shall it not effect, now that the Sun of Righteousness is shining in its meridian splendor, and the full "glory of God is displayed in the face of Jesus Christ?" Seek then to have this grace formed in your hearts: it is the root from whence all other graces proceed: it is faith that "works by love," and "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world." Live in the exercise of this grace, and all the persuasions or terrors of the world will lose their force.]

3. What a mercy it is to have God for our God!

[If once we possess this blessing, we need never fear what either men or devils can do against us. If we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, we need not be concerned about it; for our God will come and walk with us in the fire, and make the wrath of our enemies the occasions of richer communications of his love. He has said, "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour[c]." "If our afflictions for his sake abound, our consolations through him shall much more abound:" and in due season he will bring us forth "out of the furnace, purified as gold." But oh! what a furnace awaits our impenitent persecutors! Who can conceive what "a lake that is which burneth with fire and brimstone," into which all the ungodly shall be cast; and what it will be to "dwell with everlasting burnings?" But for the faithful servants of Jehovah there is reserved "an eternal weight of glory proportioned to the light and momentary afflictions" which they here endured. Fear not then, any of you, to give yourselves up to God, or to encounter the wrath of man for his sake; for "them that honour him, he will honour." Only "be faithful unto death, and he will give you a crown of life."]

[b] Heb. xi. 33, 34. [c] Isai. xliii. 2, 3.

DXCI.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM VERIFIED AND IMPROVED.

Dan. iv. 34—37. *And at the end of the days, I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me: and I blessed the Most High; and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and, for the glory of my kingdom, my honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom; and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*

A MORE remarkable history than this is not found in the annals of the world. Never was such a transition ever heard of, from such an elevation to a state of such extraordinary degradation, as that which is recorded in this chapter. The account is written by Nebuchadnezzar himself; and, doubtless by Divine direction, it was incorporated with the writings of Daniel, and made a part of the inspired volume. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest monarch then living in the world: he had subjugated many countries to his yoke; and he ruled over them with despotic sway. But on account of his excessive pride, God determined to humble him, and to make him an example to all future ages. Previously however to the execution of the judgment which he had decreed to inflict upon him, it pleased God to reveal to him, in a dream or vision, the judgment that should be executed. The vision was of a large and fruitful tree cut down; but the stump thereof was left in the ground: that stump however being intended to represent a man, who should be left exposed, like the beasts of the earth, to all varieties of weather, for the

the space of seven years, when he should again be restored to his former state of magnificence and power. The Chaldean magicians being unable to interpret this dream, Daniel was sent for; and he interpreted it to the king, in all its parts. The import of it was, that the king was to be reduced to the state of a beast for seven years; and then, being brought to a just knowledge of the One true God, he was to be restored with augmented power and splendor to his throne. Whatever impression was made by the dream, and the interpretation of it, at the time, it soon wore off; and the haughty monarch swelled with pride as much as ever. At the end of twelve months, when walking in his palace and surveying the extent and grandeur of the city Babylon, he exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty[a]?" And instantly, while the words were yet in his mouth, the wrath of God fell upon him, and he was reduced to the state of a beast, according to the vision that he had before seen. At the end of seven years the vision was yet further verified, in his restoration: and, in the words which we have read, we see the improvement which he made of the dispensation.

I. He acknowledges God as the Sovereign Disposer of all events—

[He had throughout all his former life left out of his contemplation the thoughts of an over-ruling Providence, and had ascribed all his victories to his own wisdom and prowess. If he had given any honour to another, it was to his idol, Bel. But now he saw, that Jehovah was the God of all the earth: that, however men might appear to effect great changes upon earth, they were in reality "nothing;" they were mere instruments in God's hands; the axe, or saw, with which HE executed his own designs[b]. This was clearly proved to him in the dispensation that had taken place; for, both in the judgment that he had suffered and in the mercy he had experienced, God alone had wrought; "nor could any stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

Now it would be well if all the professed worshippers of Jehovah acknowledged his uncontrollable sovereignty, and his universal agency,

[a] ver. 29, 30. [b] Isa. x. 15.

agency, in like manner. But we, almost like the Heathen themselves, are ready to ascribe every thing, whether great or small, to the wisdom and power of man. We lose sight of the first great Cause, and fix our minds only on the second causes: and rather than speak of Jehovah as determining events, we will ascribe them to luck, or chance, or accident; and will thus run into atheism itself, rather than give the glory to Him to whom it is due. But let it be remembered, that there is not any thing in the universe which is not done by the express permission of God, and in accordance with his eternal counsels. Men indeed are free agents in all that they do; but still they "do only what God's hand and counsel have determined before to be done[b]:" not the falling of a sparrow takes place but "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." This, whilst it does not in the least diminish the responsibility of men as moral agents[c], tends greatly to compose the mind under all the variety of dispensations that succeed each other; and to impress us with the idea, that whatever may be designed or done by men, God will "get himself honour," as he did on Pharaoh, and will eventually be glorified.]

II. He adores God for his dispensations towards himself—

[These had been beyond measure humiliating: yet he speaks of them in the beginning of this chapter with wonder and admiration: "I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the High God hath wrought toward me: how great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders[d]!" So also at the close of the chapter; "I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment[e]." Here he shews indeed that he was restored, not only to the possession of his throne, but to the best possible use of his faculties. The end of the dispensation was now completely answered. In truth, painful as the dispensation was, it was richly compensated, yea, infinitely overbalanced, by the effect it produced. No suffering can be accounted great, that is over-ruled for such good to the soul. To bless and adore God for our afflictions is one of the highest exercises of faith and love. Who does not admire Job, when, under the pressure of his accumulated calamities, he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord?" This is to be done, not merely when, as in Nebuchadnezzar's case, we see the termination of them; but in the very midst of them all, while they are yet lying heavy upon us, and we see no way for our escape: then, I say, we should give glory unto our God, convinced that "He doeth all things well," and saying, with Hezekiah, "Good is the word of the Lord concerning me." To kiss the rod in this

[b] Acts iv. 28. [c] Acts ii. 23. [d] ver. 2, 3. [e] The text.

this manner, "Oh! how lovely a spirit does it manifest!" How much better is it than murmuring, and complaining, and fretting under our troubles "like a wild bull in a net!" Let us imitate Nebuchadnezzar then, in this respect; and however afflictive the dispensation with which we are visited may be, let us say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."]

III. He warns others to avoid that sin which brought this calamity upon him—

[He had "walked in pride," and been abased for it below the meanest of the children of men. Secure as he had fancied himself from any calamity, God had inflicted in a moment a punishment, which might well deter all who heard of it from the commission of a similar offence. God is never at a loss for means to accomplish his righteous will: in the judgment inflicted on this haughty monarch, he has sufficiently shewn, that He is both able and determined to "abase all who walk in pride."

Now this consideration is of infinite importance, not to kings only, but to all the human race. Pride is natural to man: there is not a more powerful principle in our fallen nature than pride. The ungodly world are full of it. There is not any distinction, natural or acquired, which is not made an occasion of self-preference and self-complacency. If a man be born of high parentage, or have acquired rank or fortune by his own exertions, how will he be puffed up with his honours, and almost conceive himself to be made of a finer clay than his less-distinguished neighbour. My might and my wisdom has procured me all these things: and on the same endowments they rest for a continued enjoyment of them. Thus "they sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag." Nor is this confined to the ungodly world: there are amongst those who profess godliness, many, who are as full of pride and conceit as those who are altogether ignorant of religion: the object in which they pride themselves is changed; but the principle is the same as ever. Some, like the Pharisee in the Gospel, "trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others:" they say in their hearts, "Stand by thyself; come not near to me; I am holier than thou." Of these says God, "They are smoke in my nose[f]." Others, like Diotrephes, "love to have the pre-eminence;" and are never so happy as when they are setting forth their gifts, and passing judgment upon all that they see and hear. Self-sufficiency and self-conceit, self-seeking and self-applause, are their characteristic features; and so far from adorning the Gospel as they would be thought to do, they actually make it stink in the nostrils of all who have judgment to discriminate between good and evil. Not a few of such "novices," it is to be feared, "being lifted up with pride, fall into the condemnation of the devil." Even truly good

[f] Isai. lxv. 5.

good men are by no means so holy, but that they are in continual danger of being drawn into the indulgence of this evil principle. Hezekiah, even after his most extraordinary deliverances from enemies without, and illness within, so far forgot himself as to be lifted up with pride; and thereby provoked God to withdraw from his descendants the mercies that had been vouchsafed to him. And Paul himself was visited with a thorn in his flesh, to keep him low, "lest he should be exalted above measure[g]."

Be it known then to all, that they need to watch and pray against this malignant evil; for God will most abase all in whom it is found. Man cannot abase them; to do this is a work far above the power of any created being[h]: but God is able to do it; and he will do it. He is at no loss for means whereby to effect it[i]. Some, like Manasseh, he will take among the thorns: others, like Peter, he will leave to fall, and to disgrace their holy profession: and others, like Pharaoh, or Herod, he will plunge into the bottomless abyss of hell. "Whereinsoever they deal proudly, he will shew himself above them." Let us never then forget, that "the proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord:" that "whilst he gives grace to the humble, he will resist *them*:" and whilst "he filleth the hungry with good things, he will scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts."]

We EXHORT all then,

1. To search their hearts, in reference to this sin—

[Men who are under the influence of this sin, always find means to hide it from their own eyes. But it is to no purpose to deceive ourselves: God will not be imposed upon by specious names: he sees the evil, wherever it exists; and he hates it with a perfect hatred. Let us then endeavour to find out even the most hidden workings of this abominable evil, and implore help from God to mortify and subdue it.]

2. To be thankful for that fidelity that strives to put them on their guard against it—

[Nebuchadnezzar, though he did not reform his life, was not angry with Daniel for interpreting to him faithfully the vision he had seen. This is not always the case, especially when the sin of pride is pointed out: we are then in danger of being accounted "enemies for telling men the truth." But "let our counsel be acceptable unto you." We are constrained to "speak God's word faithfully," even if we were speaking to the greatest monarchs upon earth. Let none then, of whatever rank or class, be offended. Indeed to take offence at a faithful ministration of the word would prove the very point which it was a man's object to

[g] *Twice* mentioned, 2 Cor. xii. 7.
[h] Job xl. 11, 12.
[i] 1 Cor. xi. 30.

to deny, namely, that he was under the dominion of pride. The humble will be thankful for every hint that can be afforded them for the discovery of their most secret sins, because they will be led thereby to a deeper humiliation before God, and to a more simple affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ.]

3. To humble themselves for it as Nebuchadnezzar did—

[Nebuchadnezzar not only wrote this whole account, but circulated it throughout the whole extent of his dominions. He thought he could never take shame enough to himself for all his former pride! What a glorious evidence was this of the transforming efficacy of divine grace! It is no easy matter for any man to acknowledge and confess his pride: but to confess it openly, to take shame to himself for it publickly before all, this is a work of grace indeed! and it is the true and proper operation of grace upon the soul. We do not mean that it is necessary to publish our sins to all the world; but it is necessary to confess our faults unto those who have been more particularly affected by them. At all events, we must make confession before our God; for on that depends our present and everlasting acceptance with him: it is impossible, "if we harden ourselves against him, to prosper:" yea, "we shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." "Whoso exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."]

DXCII.

BELSHAZZAR WARNED OF HIS IMPENDING RUIN.

Dan. v. 5, 6. *In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against the other.*

IN former days, God was pleased to reveal his mind and will to men by dreams, and visions, and signs of different kinds; and this he did, not to his friends only, but also to his enemies. To Nebuchadnezzar he revealed his purposes towards the world at large, in the successive establishment and ruin of four mighty empires, and of the final erection of the Messiah's kingdom, which should stand for ever. His purposes also towards this monarch in particular

particular he was pleased to make known through the same medium of communication. In like manner, to the impious Belshazzar he here in a miraculous manner foretold the impending destinies of himself and of his falling empire. The effect of this revelation upon the mind of Belshazzar is described in the words which we have just read; and it will give occasion to many useful reflections, whilst we consider,

I. His overwhelming fears —

[That the sight of a hand-writing upon the wall of his room should surprise him, we may well expect. But why should it create in him such terror as is described in our text? What though he did not understand the writing? he need not on that account to be dismayed, if he had no inward reason to interpret the sign itself as auguring ill of him. But conscience, which had long been silenced by him, now lifted up its voice, and spoke to him in the language of keen remonstrance, and of dire foreboding: and this it was that made "his loins to shake, and his knees to smite one against the other."

Now this is a striking and instructive incident. We may by carelessness and dissipation drown for a season the voice of conscience; (unhappily for them, many succeed in this too well!) but sooner or later it will speak, and *that* too in such an authoritative tone as will make the stoutest sinner tremble. Every one, whether willingly or not, must listen to it at last: and the longer our attention to it is delayed, the more poignant and terrible will its reproaches be. Behold the convictions of the converts on the day of Pentecost, or the desponding and self-destroying attitude of the jailer! yet these were the kindlier offices of conscience for their good[a]. In many who continue to withstand its dictates, it stings, it rankles, it corrodes, it fills with gloom and melancholy, destroying all their peace, and leaving them nothing but "a certain fearful-looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume them." And oh! with what horrors does it fill them at the instant of their departure from the body, and will fill them in the day that they shall be summoned to the judgment-seat of Christ! What "fearfulness will then surprise the hypocrites, when they see nothing before them but dwelling with devouring fire and in everlasting burnings[b]!" How will they then "call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of that Lamb" of God, whom here they have neglected and despised! Brethren, listen to the voice of this faithful monitor: let not its slightest whispers be unheeded by you: cherish it; consult it on all occasions; labour to the uttermost to "keep it pure; attend to it, and it will prove your kindest

[a] Acts ii. 37. & xvi. 26—30. [b] Isai. xxxiii. 14.

kindest friend: neglect it, and it will be to all eternity your bitterest enemy.]

Consequent on these terrors were,

II. His anxious inquiries—

[" He cried aloud to bring in all the magicians," that he might inquire of them the import of what was written: and when they were unable to give a satisfactory reply, he was induced to send for Daniel, who on former occasions had expounded the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar, but had since been neglected by the weak ungrateful prince who now sat upon the Chaldean throne: now was he glad to learn, even from him, a just interpretation of the words before him.

Here again then we see what sinners will be driven to, when Conscience summons them to its bar, and constrains them to call their former ways to remembrance. Then they will be glad to be instructed in the written word of God: yea, they will request instruction even from a neglected and despised Daniel, in whose judgment and fidelity they can trust, when they have seen, that those on whom they before relied were "physicians of no value." But let not these inquiries be delayed. There is a hand-writing against us all; a writing so plain and intelligible, that "he who runs may read it." It requires no Daniel, no person of extraordinary wisdom, to expound it. We may see in the sacred volume, which lies open before our eyes, "the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" You need not go to men to interpret this to you: go to God; and he will expound it to you, and by his Spirit will "give you an understanding to understand it." But it is not a sentence of condemnation only that is written there: no; blessed be God! there are many glorious sentences which proclaim pardon and peace through the atoning blood of Christ ——— Read these; meditate on these: and your fears shall speedily be dispelled; and your sorrows be turned into joy. Mark the answers given to those whose terrors we have before spoken of, and the effect of those answers on their souls; and then you will see what you may assuredly expect as the result of your inquiries, if only they be made in sincerity and truth[c].]

The instruction given him was however unavailing: it had no effect on,

III. His confirmed obduracy—

[He listened not only to the instructions, but also to the reproofs of Daniel, who set before him the guilt he had contracted, by his misimprovement of those judgments which had been inflicted on Nebuchadnezzar for his pride; as also by his utter

[c] Note [a], with Acts ii. 38, 46, 47. & xvi. 34.

utter neglect of Jehovah, "in whose hand his life was;" and particularly in so heinously insulting God, as to take the sacred vessels of the sanctuary and profane them in his drunken revels, and make them an occasion of exalting his gods of wood and stone above him. Having set before him these grounds of God's displeasure, Daniel proceeded to explain the writing, and to tell him from God, that his life and kingdom were just ready to be delivered over to his enemies. All this he heard without offence; and he even gave orders, that the promised rewards should instantly be conferred on this faithful servant. But we hear not one word of humiliation on account of all his wickedness: he he does not, like Ahab, humble himself in sackcloth and ashes[d]; he does not, like the Ninevites, proclaim a fast; he does not even, like Pharaoh, say, I have sinned; nor does he even, like Simon Magus, desire Daniel's intercession, that these judgments might not fall upon him[e]. He seems altogether insensible, given over to a reprobate mind and an obdurate heart.

And do we not often see a similar result from all the most faithful expositions of God's word? A momentary fear perhaps may be excited, even to terror; but no solid improvement follows it; no godly sorrow is produced in the soul; no humiliation before God; no cries for mercy; no departure from iniquity. But, if we thus "harden ourselves against God, can we prosper?" No: "he that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without a remedy."]

In reading this account, we cannot but OBSERVE,

1. The vanity of all earthly enjoyments—

[What can we conceive more gratifying to flesh and blood, than to be entertaining, as Belshazzar did, such multitudes of his nobles, together with all his wives and concubines? Yet, behold, how in an instant all his pleasure vanished, and was turned into insupportable agony of mind! Nor is such a change uncommon: many in the midst of the most licentious scenes have been struck with horror, and made to anticipate their final doom: even a thought passing through the mind has been sufficient to cast a damp over the spirits, and to rob the soul of all its gaiety. What folly then to seek our happiness in things which are so unsatisfactory at best, and which may so speedily become an occasion of our more aggravated woe! Let us remember, that all which the world can afford is "vanity and vexation of spirit." As for "laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, it may be asked, What doeth it?" Yea, even in "laughter, the soul is often sorrowful; and the end of all such mirth is heaviness."]

2. The comfort of a good conscience—

[Daniel was not alarmed, notwithstanding his life was in jeopardy,

[d] 1 Kin. xxi. 27. [e] Acts viii. 24.

jeopardy, as well as the life of all who dwelt in Babylon. But Daniel enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience, and therefore had confidence towards God. He knew that the enemy could only kill the body; and that the death of the body would translate his soul into the more immediate presence of his God. Thus Paul, when ready to be offered up a sacrifice, contemplated his departure with joy, assured, that the Lord, the righteous Judge, had prepared for him a never-fading crown of righteousness and glory. And Peter also, when on the very eve of expected martyrdom, and chained to two soldiers, was sleeping as sweetly, as if he had known that God had decreed to liberate him from his prison. Such are the effects of peace with God, and peace in our own conscience. Let us but maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and man," and nothing shall have power to disturb our rest. Assured that "nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus," we shall smile at all the storms that encompass us around, and "commit ourselves with confidence into the hands of a faithful Creator."]

3. The blessedness of an interest in Christ—

[Whatever "hand-writing there is against us" in the Scriptures of truth, Christ has "blotted it out, and taken it out of the way, nailing it, as a cancelled bond, unto his cross[f]." Search the sacred volume from one end to the other, and not one word will be found menacing to a believing penitent. The very moment we believe in Christ, all our iniquities, of whatever kind, are blotted out as a morning cloud, and shall never more be remembered against us. Is there then any one amongst us that "trembles at God's word?" let him know, that the more he trembles, the less reason he has to tremble; since God looks upon him with complacency[g], and engages "in no wise to cast him out." Suppose that such an one beheld at this moment written on the wall before him, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN;" and that we were authorized to expound it to him, "Thy days are numbered; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting; and all that thou hast shall now be divided by thy surviving relatives, thy soul being summoned into the presence of its God;" even were this so, he need not fear, because Christ, being apprehended by faith, shall be put into the scale, and make it preponderate in his favour. We do not mean by this, that Christ and his merits are to be added to something of our own; (for He alone must be put into the scale against our sins;) but this we mean; that if there were the sins of the whole world lying on the soul of a single individual, the blood of Christ, applied by faith, should cleanse him from it, and the righteousness of Christ be a sufficient plea for his acceptance with God. Seek then, Beloved, to be united unto Christ by faith; and then, instead of trembling at his approach, you shall "rejoice before him at his coming."]

[f] Col. ii. 14. [g] Isai. lxvi. 2.

DXCIII.

BELSHAZZAR'S DEATH.

Dan. v. 30. *In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain.*

"KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." We speak of things as fortuitous and contingent, because we see not the hand by which they are directed: but, in reality, there is nothing contingent, not even the falling of a sparrow: "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." Sometimes it has pleased God to make known, beforehand, events, which depended entirely upon the free will of man; while at the same time they were as infallibly foreseen by him as if man had been a mere machine, without the smallest exercise of choice or inclination. Such were the events which facilitated or attended the destruction of the Babylonish empire. It was optional with Belshazzar whether he would make a feast for his lords, and drink to excess: and it was optional with Cyrus what moment he should seize for making his attack upon the city: but all was foretold by God, with a minuteness and precision which proclaim at once the omniscience of the Deity, and the dependence of all things upon his sovereign will[a]. The event before us had long before been proclaimed by the voice of inspiration: and it will be profitable for us to consider,

I. The time of Belshazzar's death—

In the words, "*that night*," there is an emphasis which must not be overlooked. It was the night,

1. Of his feasting—

[He had "made a feast for a thousand of his lords." We mean not to condemn all feasts: for our blessed Lord himself repeatedly vouchsafed to be present at a feast. But the generality of "banquetings," and "revellings, and *such like*," are among those works of the flesh, which they who do, shall not inherit the kingdom of God[b]." Of this kind was Belshazzar's feast; at which he gave himself up to mirth, and banished all thoughts of death from his mind.

What an awful thing to be taken at such a moment! Yet how many

[a] Jer. li. 11, 39, 57. [b] Gal. v. 21.

many are there, who, if not slain like him, yet are called away from the midst of the cares or pleasures of this life as unprepared as he! It was so at the time of the Deluge: it will be so at the end of the world: and it is so yet daily and hourly[c]. "The foolish virgins" greatly out-number those who are wise; and have their oil to seek when the Bridegroom's arrival is announced. "They are saying, Peace, peace; till sudden destruction cometh upon them as a thief in the night, or as travail on a woman with child[d]." The Lord grant it may never be so with us!]

2. Of his impiety—

[Feasting and impiety are not unfrequently associated. The generality of men seem to think that they cannot enjoy any comfort in social converse, unless they give way to excess, and banish decency and religion from their presence. Belshazzar could not be content with the pleasure which this feast afforded, but he must openly pour contempt on God, and set *him* at defiance. Accordingly, he ordered the sacred vessels, which his grandfather had taken from the temple at Jerusalem, to be brought forth for the use of himself and his wives and concubines; and then celebrated his gods as superior to Jehovah, over whom (as it should seem) they had triumphed. This completed the measure of his iniquities, and drew down upon him "the vengeance of the Lord, *the vengeance of his Temple*[e]." Perhaps we may think the crime and the punishment uncommon: but neither the one nor the other is at all uncommon. What are the songs that are usually sung at feasts, but songs in honour of Bacchus and Venus, the heathen patrons of riot and debauchery? What are the toasts or sentiments, in commendation of which the wine is poured out and drunk? what, but a tissue of lewdness and profaneness? And how often do they who engage in such scenes, come to an untimely end! One falls from his horse; another is overturned in a carriage; another run over by a cart; another is drowned; another is killed in an affray. *We call these things accidents:* but if an inspired prophet were sent to declare the truth, we should find them "*the vengeance of the Lord*, the vengeance of his temple."

And may not we look back to some day, or some night, when God might have cut us off, as it were, to advantage, if not in a state of riot and intoxication, yet in some other state equally displeasing to him? O let us call to mind those seasons; and adore his name, that "*in that night*" we were not summoned, with all our iniquities upon us, to give account of ourselves at his judgment-seat!]

3. Of his warning—

[While Belshazzar was indulging in his impious revels, he saw an hand-writing upon the wall of the room wherein he sat. Terrified

[c] Matt. xxiv. 37—39. [d] 1 Thess. v. 2, 3. [e] Note [a].

Terrified beyond measure at so strange a sight, he called for all his magicians and astrologers to read and explain the words. None of them being able to explain the writing, Daniel was sent for: and he, by Divine inspiration, declared the sentence which God had thus visibly proclaimed. On any other occasion, if we may judge from the neglect into which Daniel had fallen, Belshazzar would have fiercely resented the faithfulness with which this prophet of the Lord had denounced his doom: but his terror had softened him for a moment; yet not so softened him as to produce any genuine repentance in his heart. He ordered the promised reward to be given to Daniel; but we do not find that he humbled himself before God, or uttered one prayer for mercy. Scarcely was the warning explained to him, but it was executed on him, and on all his dissolute companions. Yes; "*in that night* was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, slain." As his royalty did not save him, so neither did his terror obtain for him one moment's respite. He heard, he trembled, he died. He had seen (as Daniel told him) the judgments that had been executed on Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather; and yet had not profited by that warning, or humbled himself before the God of heaven: now therefore the warning and the judgment came together: nor was any further space given him for repentance.

[How differently has God acted hitherto towards *us!* Many are the warnings which we have slighted; and yet, behold, we live! ——— But how soon his patience may come to an end, and a termination be put to our day of grace, who can tell? ———]

Such was the season when this unhappy monarch was called into the presence of his Judge. Let us next consider,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Surely we may learn from this,

1. Not to provoke the Lord to jealousy—

[It matters not whether, with Belshazzar, we "praise gods of wood and stone," or whether we "set up idols in our hearts:" in either case, God is dethroned; and "other lords besides him have dominion over us." And shall we think lightly of our guilt, while in such a state as this? or shall we imagine that God regards it with indifference? No: "he is a jealous God: his very name is Jealous[f]:" and "his glory he will not give," or allow to be given, "to another." Look then within your own bosoms, ye who are so addicted to the pursuits of this life as scarcely to have any time or inclination for reading the Scriptures and for secret prayer; ye whose feelings are quickly roused when your honour or your interest are at stake, and yet

[f] Exod. xxxiv. 14.

yet are unconcerned about the honour of God or the interests of your souls; look, I say, within, and see whether God has not reason to be jealous of you; and whether he might not justly destroy you instantly with fire, as he did Nadab and Abihu; or cause the earth to swallow you up quick, as he did to Korah and his rebellious associates? Do not imagine that you are innocent, because you do not follow the *practices* of Belshazzar: see whether you be not living in his *spirit*; and whether you are not despising God in your heart, as much as he did in his actions; and idolizing the world in your heart, as much as he did his fictitious deities in his drunken carousals? And know, that though your idolatry is less gross than his, it involves you in deeper guilt, in proportion as the meridian light of the Gospel transcends the darkness of Heathen superstition.]

2. Not to despise the warnings you receive—

[You have not an hand-writing visibly on the wall: but have you not other warnings, equally legible, on every side? How many are cut off around you, some old, some young, and some in the prime of life! How many sudden deaths take place, or, if not sudden in respect of time, yet unexpected by the persons themselves[g]! Are the disorders which you see or feel, no warnings? But you have an hand-writing, yea, the hand-writing of God himself; you may see it in the Scriptures of truth: there you may see written, as with a sun-beam, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN:" to *you* it speaks: *your* days are numbered, and nearly finished: *you* are weighed in a balance, and found wanting: and all hope of enjoying the kingdom of Heaven will be quickly taken from you, if you do not turn unto God with your whole hearts. God says to you, "My son, give me thine heart:" any thing short of this will be to no purpose. O that you would now "open unto Him that knocketh at the door of your hearts;" and that "the long-suffering of God might now at last lead you to repentance!"]

3. Not to delay the great work you have to do—

[Whilst you are living at your ease, and putting the thoughts of death far from you, God may be saying, "Thou fool, *this night* shall thy soul be required of thee." And O, how terrible would this be to the generality! To some indeed sudden death would be sudden glory: but to others how different! Herod made a feast; and, in compliance with his daughter's request, gave her John Baptist's head in a charger: yes, *that night* was John the Baptist slain. But how different was *that night* to John the Baptist and Belshazzar! the one went from a prison to a crown; the

[g] If this be preached as a *New-Year's* Discourse, the last year may be represented as *dead*, or as cut off from our short span of life, which therefore is proportionably contracted.

the other from a palace to a lake of fire. Inquire, I pray you, how death would find you, if it should come *this night*: and if you are unprepared to meet it, O delay not one hour; give not sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, till you have obtained peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Converted you *must* be; or you can never enter into the kingdom of heaven." Your "conscience must be sprinkled with the atoning blood of Jesus," or your sins will infallibly plunge you into everlasting perdition. Seize then the fleeting hour. Adore your God that you have not been taken away, as thousands of your fellow-creatures have been, with all your sins upon you: and "to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your heart;" lest like them you perish in impenitence and unbelief.]

DXCIV.

DANIEL'S UNDAUNTED PIETY.

Dan. vi. 10. *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

SUCH is the hatred which ungodly men bear to real piety, that it is not possible to serve our God aright without incurring their displeasure. Neither eminence in station, nor prudence of conduct, will screen us from the assaults of their envy and malice. If any thing could have secured the favour of mankind, the wise and benevolent deportment of Jesus must have gained him universal approbation. But he was as much distinguished by the virulence of men's hatred, as he was by the unrivalled excellence of his own character.

Of all the persons whose history is recorded in the Old Testament, we know not one who surpassed Daniel in wisdom, in integrity, or in a firm adherence to practical religion. His bitterest enemies, who were very desirous of finding in him some fault or error, were constrained to acknowledge, that they should not be able to attain their wishes, unless they should find it concerning the law of his God. Would one not have thought, that a person who could conduct

duct the affairs of a large empire with such skill, as that no error could be imputed to him; and whose piety was so consistent, that not the smallest flaw could be found in his whole conduct; should be universally beloved? Yet, so far was he from being an object of universal regard, that a conspiracy was formed against him by all the great men of the kingdom, and a law was framed, that rendered it criminal to pray unto his God. By this law he had no alternative, but to violate the law and incur its penalties, or to violate his conscience and offend his God.

Daniel, without hesitation, chose the better part: and, "when he knew that the writing (which doomed him to the den of lions) was signed," he openly worshipped God, precisely as he had done aforetime.

To encourage all who are oppressed and persecuted, to follow his example, we shall,

I. Make some remarks on his conduct—

[It might be said of Daniel continually, "Behold he prayeth!" ——— But why, in praying, did he look "towards Jerusalem?" Canaan was the land, Jerusalem the city, and the Temple the house, in which God more particularly dwelt. And at the dedication of the Temple, Solomon repeatedly intreated that God would hear the supplications of his people which should be offered towards that land, that city, that Temple[a]. This had been before practised by David[b], as it was afterwards by Jonah when at the bottom of the sea[c]: and it may be considered as a *typical* ordinance, directing *us* to pray unto God, as our covenant-God in Christ, as dwelling with man, yea, as dwelling in our very nature[d]; even to Him, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily[e]."

In this manner he prayed "three times a day." It seems to have been the habit of all pious Jews to observe stated seasons of worship three times a day. David practised it in his day[f]: and in the Apostolic age the practice was continued[g]. One would have

[a] 1 Kin. viii. 29, 30, 35, 38, 42, 44, but especially 46—50 which specifies what was to be done *in a state of captivity*, as Daniel now was.

[b] Ps. v. 7. [c] Jon. ii. 4.

[d] John i. 14. ἐσκήνωσεν suggests the precise idea, which the type was intended to convey.

[e] Col. ii. 9. [f] Ps lv. 17.

[g] Acts ii. 2, 15. & iii. 1. & x. 9. The *third*, *sixth*, and *ninth* hours answered to *nine*, *twelve*, and *three* with us.

have thought that a person who had so much secular business upon his hands as Daniel had, should have found it almost impossible to maintain such a practice with any degree of regularity, or indeed with any spirituality of mind: but, if the heart be thoroughly imbued with Divine grace, it will be found neither difficult nor irksome to lift it up to God in prayer, even in the midst of the most urgent business.

Nor was Daniel inattentive to his posture in prayer: "he kneeled upon his knees, and prayed." We do not say that this posture is indispensably necessary to the acceptance of our prayers; because we find instances in Scripture of persons standing when they prayed: but it is sanctioned by the example of the most eminent saints[h], and even by our blessed Lord himself[i]. As for the idle slothful posture of sitting during the time of prayer (as is the habit of too many), we do not hesitate to say, that it is most irreverent, unscriptural, and offensive. But what shall we say to those who defer their prayers till they have lain down in their beds, and then offer some petitions, in the midst of which they fall asleep? Surely it is scarcely needful to tell them what acceptance such services must meet with: they may account it a mercy, if their solemn mockery of God be not visited with some signal judgments: to hope for any favourable answer to such prayers, were folly and impiety. Daniel would not yield to such indolent habits, though he was above ninety years of age; because he knew that the deepest prostration of body should accompany the devotions of the soul, and that nothing but extreme weakness could justify us in dispensing with it.

With all his prayers, Daniel offered also a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving: "he prayed and gave thanks." This argued the sincerity of his heart. They can feel but little gratitude to God, who do not acknowledge the mercies they have received, as well as ask for the continuance and increase of them. The direction given us by God himself is, "that in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* we should make our requests known to him[k]:" yea, it is his express will and command that we should abound in thanksgiving as much, and as constantly, as in prayer itself[l].

Perhaps it may surprise us, that Daniel offered these his devotions always "with his windows open." Was this from ostentation? Was Daniel like those Pharisees who "prayed standing in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen and admired of men?" No: Daniel was in a heathen land, where the established religion was idolatry; and where Jehovah was not worshipped or acknowledged. He therefore felt it incumbent on him

[h] Thus did David: Ps. xcv. 6. Solomon: 2 Chron. vi. 13. Ezra: Ezra ix. 5. Stephen: Acts vii. 60. Peter: ix. 40. Paul: xx. 36, a large assembly on the sea shore: xxi. 5.

[i] Luke xxii. 41. [k] Phil. iv. 6. [l] 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

him to let it be universally known, that he was a worshipper of the one true God: he wished to be a witness for God, and against idolatry; and to lead men, by his example, to inquire after the God of the Hebrews, in whom alone they could obtain peace and salvation. And though this habit rendered him singular, and excited the odium of his ungodly neighbours, "he endured the cross, and despised the shame," and persevered in the performance of his duty without any regard to the opinions of men.

The most extraordinary thing is, that Daniel persisted in this habit "when he knew that the writing was signed." The writing was the law which had been recently enacted, condemning to the den of lions every person, who, for the space of thirty days, should presume to ask any petition of any God or man, except of the king only. This writing was signed by the king; and the law was thereby rendered (according to the absurd custom of the Medes and Persians) unchangeable. But this could not deter Daniel from serving God, or induce him for one moment to change his mode of serving him. He was willing to die for the Lord's sake; and was determined to suffer all the penalties of the law rather than violate his duty to his God.]

But as there were various other modes in which Daniel might have proceeded, we shall consider his conduct more minutely, and

II. State the reasons of it—

Daniel persisted in this open acknowledgment of Jehovah,

1. From a sense of duty—

[He knew that it was his duty to pray unto his God, and to confess him before men. Had the laws of the realm enjoined nothing contrary to the laws of God, he would have felt it his duty to comply with them: "he would have obeyed every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." But when man took upon him to supersede the laws of God, he felt that he had a paramount obligation to serve the Lord. In this respect he resembled the holy Apostles, when they were forbidden to preach in the name of Christ: they answered the Magistrates who laid a similar injunction on them, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have heard and seen[m]:" "we must obey God rather than men[n]."]

2. From a regard for God's honour—

[We will suppose that Daniel had withdrawn from his place of abode, or shut his window and contented himself with worshipping God in secret; he might still have performed

[m] Acts iv. 19, 20. [n] Acts v. 28, 29.

formed his duty as far as respected the mere act of prayer: but what would have been the consequence with respect to God's honour? Would not the framers of the law have boasted, that they had triumphed over Jehovah; that they had set up a god superior to him; and that his most devoted servant dared not to confess him? Would they not have said, that the worshippers of Jehovah were as devoid of principle as any other people in the world; for that, with all their professed regard for him, they did not believe him able to rescue or support them; and that they loved their own safety in preference to their God? No doubt, they would have gloried thus, and have despised both Jehovah and all his servants. But would Daniel give occasion for such profane triumph? He abhorred the thought; and therefore would not relax, or intermit so much as once, his accustomed mode of worship. Similar to his was the conduct of Nehemiah, when Sanballat and Tobiah wanted to intimidate him, and to lead him into an act which should betray a want of confidence in his God: "Shall such a man as I flee? said he: And who is there, that being as I am, would go into the Temple to save his life? I will not go in[o]." Thus, whatever specious arguments might have suggested themselves to him for the preservation of his life, Daniel determined to die rather than dishonour God; being anxious only that "God should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death[p]."]

3. For the encouragement of his own people—

[Suppose that Daniel had not thus openly maintained his stedfastness, What would all the rest of his captive brethren have done? Would not they have caught the infection? would not they have dissembled with him, just as Barnabas and others were led away with Peter's dissimulation[q]? It would have been to little purpose that he prayed in secret, if he had been so shamefully regardless of the influence of his example. On the other hand, by boldly confessing his God before men, and offering himself up as a sacrifice for him, the rest of his nation must be emboldened to maintain a similar fidelity, and to brave all the threatenings of their idolatrous oppressors. This was the effect produced by Paul's submission to bonds and imprisonment for the Gospel's sake: "Many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident by his bonds, were much more bold to preach the word without fear[r]." Daniel, being at the head of the kingdom, knew the vast importance of his example; and therefore on this account, as well as for the foregoing reasons, "would not give place, no, not for an hour[s]:" yea, we doubt not but that in offering himself upon the sacrifice and service of his people's faith, he joyed and rejoiced with them all; and (in his heart) called on them to joy and rejoice with him[t].]

ADDRESS,

[o] Neh. vi. 10, 11. [p] Phil. i. 20. [q] Gal. ii. 12, 13.
[r] Phil. i. 14. [s] Gal. ii. 5. [t] Phil. ii. 17, 18.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who live in the neglect of prayer—

[We see in the example of Daniel how a Child of God will act: he will pray with frequency, with fervour, with an especial regard to God as his Covenant-God in Christ Jesus; and he will confess his God openly, determining to die for him rather than deny him[u]. Now what resemblance have you to Daniel? He could not be kept from prayer; you cannot be prevailed on to pray: he could not be kept from prayer, though he knew that, for continuing it, he should be cast into the den of lions; and you cannot be prevailed on to pray, though your neglect of it will infallibly bring you into the depths of hell. Not all the terrors of death could induce him to omit so much as one single opportunity of praying; and not all the terrors of damnation can instigate you to pray even once with real fervour and devotion. Only ask yourselves, How often have you prayed like Daniel? how often in the day? in the week? in the year? how often even in your whole life? This question will give you an insight into your state before God. O that it may be the means of bringing you to his footstool, and of forming in you those habits which are altogether necessary to your salvation.]

2. Those who are habituated to serve their God—

[Be not surprised if you are called to suffer for righteousness' sake, "nor think it strange if you be tried with a fiery trial." Should this be the case, we congratulate you upon the honour conferred upon you; and we exhort you to "rejoice and leap for joy; for so persecuted they the Prophets that were before you[x]." Our Lord's direction is, "Be not afraid of man, who can only kill the body; but fear Him who can cast both body and soul into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."

But while we exhort you to "be faithful unto death," and, like Daniel, to withstand all the powers of earth and hell, we would particularly intreat you to imitate his spirit. In the first place, let your enemies "find nothing against you, except concerning the law of God." In the next place, conduct yourselves with meekness under your sufferings. You read not of his exciting clamour and rebellion in the State, but of his submitting patiently to the cruelty of his oppressors. We mean not to condemn such an opposition to tyranny, as the law itself admits; but such as is unconstitutional, turbulent, and factious: and we cannot but recommend a cheerful submission to persecution, as, on the whole, most profitable to ourselves, and most honourable to our God[y]. Indeed, when suffering for righteousness' sake, we may expect extraordinary interpositions for our deliverance or support, and may hope to win those who have been the authors of all our troubles[z].]

[u] Acts xx. 24. & xxi. 13. [x] Matt. v. 11, 12. [y] 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.
[z] See a most encouraging and well-authenticated instance in Benson's Life of Mr. Fletcher, p. 309. first edition.

DXCV.

THE DECREE OF DARIUS.

Dan. vi. 25—27. *Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever; and his kingdom, that which shall not be destroyed; and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*

IT is the prerogative of God, not only to defeat all the designs of men or devils against him, but to advance his own glory by the very means which his enemies use to obstruct it. The wisdom and fidelity of Daniel had secured for him in the Court of Persia the same influence as he had been honoured with by the kings of Babylon; but the princes of that empire sought his destruction, and, together with that, the subversion of all the influence of Daniel's God. They devised a plan, in which they too fatally succeeded, to establish a law, by which Daniel must of necessity, if faithful to his God, be condemned. King Darius, when he saw into what a snare he had been drawn, sought to deliver Daniel from the sentence which the law, so inconsiderately enacted, denounced against him: but he could not prevail; and therefore at last consented to the execution of it on his faithful and unoffending servant. Daniel was cast into the den of lions: and with him, the hope of further protection to the Jewish captives must cease. But behold, God, as Darius himself had hoped, interposed for the preservation of Daniel; and thereby shewed to the conviction of Darius, that he was the One omnipotent and only true God. Darius now ordered the very punishment which Daniel's enemies had sought to inflict on him, to be executed on them; and immediately issued throughout the whole extent of his dominions the decree contained in our text.

We propose to consider,

I. His

I. His views of Daniel's God—

We are quite surprised that a Heathen, who had so impiously exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, should have such just views, as he shews himself to have had, of the God of Israel. In describing Jehovah, he speaks of,

1. His essential perfections—

[Darius had hitherto known only the gods of gold and silver, or of wood and stone, which had no existence till they were formed into an image by the hands of man; and which, when formed, were lifeless and motionless as the materials of which they were made. But of Jehovah he had far different views: he saw him to be the eternal self-existent God, who, whilst he alone had life in himself, was the one only source of life and being to all his creatures. Him too he saw to be an unchangeable God, "stedfast for ever" in all his purposes, and immutable in all his counsels.

This is such a view of God as all of us should have: if we see not his self-sufficiency, we shall never feel persuaded of his all-sufficiency for our help[a]: ——— and if we be not convinced, that "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning[b]," we shall never know whence our own stability arises[c], or enjoy the consolation which God himself designs that we should derive from this never-failing source[d] ———]

2. His universal dominion—

[Here, we apprehend, this heathen monarch did not limit his views to the providential government of Jehovah over all the works of his hands; but that he spoke also of that spiritual kingdom which should be erected by the Messiah, and which was to be both universal in its extent and everlasting in its duration. The dream and vision of Nebuchadnezzar were well known throughout all the Babylonish empire. In this vision the destruction of Babylon was expressly foretold; and, after the establishment and ruin of three successive kingdoms, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman, a fifth kingdom was to arise, namely, that of the Messiah, which should break in pieces all other kingdoms, and stand for ever. The first part of this dream had now recently been fulfilled; and fulfilled by the very person who had been foretold *by name* three hundred years before he was brought into the world; and in the precise manner also that had been circumstantially foretold at the same distant period. These prophecies, beyond all doubt, were shewn to Cyrus and Darius, as soon as they became masters of Babylon: and the miracle just wrought

[a] Isai. xxvi. 4. [b] Jam. i. 17. [c] Mal. iii. 6.
[d] Heb. vi. 17, 18.

wrought by Jehovah in favour of Daniel, brought additional conviction to the mind of Darius, that the Messiah's reign should be such as had been predicted.

[This is a glorious view, of which we should never lose sight. It was this which Abraham delighted to contemplate*, and which has filled the saints of all succeeding ages with unutterable joy. To us, no less than to those of former ages, it yet remains as an object of hope. The predicted kingdom is indeed established; but it is as yet but very limited in its extent: nevertheless we believe that the word of God respecting it shall stand, and that "all the kingdoms of the world shall in due time become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ"———]

3. His miracles of love and mercy towards his believing people—

[Here also Darius speaks in general terms: the deliverance of Daniel from the lion's den is considered by him as a single instance only of the innumerable interpositions which God vouchsafes to his people, and of the wonders which he works in their behalf. The whole history of the Jewish people, from their departure out of Egypt to their final dispersion by the Romans, is one continued record of stupendous miracles and gracious deliverances.

True it is, that miracles are ceased: but wonders, if we may so speak, are quite as common as in the days of old. Wherein is the deliverance of a soul from death and hell inferior to the deliverance of the Hebrew youths from the fiery furnace; or the preservation of Daniel in the lions' den, to the preservation of Believers from the assaults of that roaring lion that is ever seeking to devour them? This view then of the Deity is still to be ever kept in mind, in order that we may never give way to fear, or doubt a moment but that He who hath hitherto delivered us will go on to deliver, and will preserve us safely to his heavenly kingdom———]

Such being his views of the Deity, we are no longer surprised at,

II. His decree founded upon them—

An external worship was deemed sufficient for senseless idols; but not so for the God of heaven and earth: the decree before us required much more than that. Let us distinctly notice,

1. Its import—

[The terms "fear and tremble" seem to import only a dread of God, as a terrible Being whom it was dangerous to provoke:

* John viii. 56.

provoke: but the meaning of them is widely different from this. Throughout all the New Testament these words express rather a holy reverential regard, blended with love to Him who is the object of it. St. Paul, when at Corinth, was amongst his converts "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling[f];" not surely with a slavish dread of their wrath, but with a holy anxiety to fulfil his ministry to their greatest advantage. He exhorts servants to "obey their masters with fear and trembling[g];" that is, with a tender conscience, and an affectionate regard to their will. He bids us also to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling[h]," that is, with the utmost watchfulness and care. Thus we understand the decree of Darius as enjoining to all his subjects, that they should serve God with a holy and affectionate regard to his revealed will. We conceive that the terms of the decree do in effect enjoin all that worship which is required of us under the Gospel: for David, speaking expressly of the worship to be paid to the Messiah, says, "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling[i];" which shews that "fear and trembling," properly understood, does not expel, but only moderates and tempers, our joy. Indeed, "the angel that is represented as carrying the everlasting Gospel throughout all the earth," proclaims it in terms of similar import, "Fear God, and give glory to him[k]." We see then, that the decree did go, in fact, to the abolition of idolatry, and to the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout that vast empire: only, not being followed up by similar enactments, and a practical exhibition of its import by those who were at the head of the empire, it fell to the ground; as all precepts must do, if not followed up by constant exertions and corresponding examples. One effect however necessarily followed from it, namely, to procure more favour to the Jews throughout the empire, and ultimately to facilitate the reception of Christianity throughout the world.]

2. The reasonableness of it—

[Who can contemplate the foregoing views of the Deity, and not confess the reasonableness of the decree founded upon them?

Consider *the power and authority* of God; consider him as the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe; and can a doubt be entertained whether we ought to fear and serve him? Consider also *the love and mercy* of God, particularly as manifested in the redemption of men by the blood of his only dear Son, and the blessings vouchsafed to them through his all-sufficient grace; can any one who adverts to this subject question the propriety of surrendering ourselves up, in body, soul, and spirit, to his service? ——— It matters not what rank in society we hold, or what office we may fill; the decree is equally applicable to all, and

[f] 1 Cor. ii. 3. [g] Eph. vi. 5. [h] Phil. ii. 12.
[i] Ps. ii. 11. [k] Rev. xiv. 6, 7.

and equally reasonable for all: kings and princes are no more exempt from these duties than the meanest of their subjects: as long as subordination to rulers is held sacred, much more must a duteous regard to the God of heaven be sacred———and, as long as gratitude is esteemed a becoming principle in relation to men, so long must its exercise be obligatory on all towards the Redeemer of the world———]

BEHOLD then in this decree,

1. The effect which God's mercies should have upon us—

[Darius felt the deliverance of Daniel to be in fact as great a mercy to himself as it was to Daniel: and a sense of this penetrated his soul with a desire to honour that God by whom the mercy had been vouchsafed. This was right. And is it not right that mercies and deliverances should have the same effect on us? Consider what mercies we have received; some public and national, and others private and personal[l]———Should no improvement be made of these? Should we not say, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Surely these things, and especially the mercies vouchsafed to our souls———are calls from God himself to glorify him with all our faculties and all our powers[m]———]

2. What use we should make of our influence—

[To serve God ourselves is right and necessary: but it is far from comprehending the whole of what is required of us in return for the mercies vouchsafed unto us. We all have influence, which it is our bounden duty to exert: if that influence reach only to a very small circle, we should not on that account think ourselves at liberty to leave it unimproved: nor if it extend over a vast empire, should we be backward to encounter the opposition and obloquy which the exercise of it may bring upon us. Whatever it be, whether more or less, we should regard it as a talent to be employed for God. Even a heathen, and he, we fear, not truly converted, felt this obligation: how much more then should we, who profess to embrace the Christian faith, and to enjoy all the blessings of the Gospel salvation! But we greatly mistake, if we imagine that the influence of any amongst us is small: for if we unite our efforts together, and act in concert with each other, we may do far more than Darius could with all his power. Let any one contemplate the *Bible Society*, in which the poor, strange as it may seem, do far more than the rich; and see what wonders are doing by means of it throughout the world———Let any one contemplate *Mission Societies*, which are in fact forwarding, as

[l] Here any public or private mercies may be glanced at.
[m] The particular objects of the Society may here be stated at large.

as it were, the very decree of Darius, and calling on "all people, nations, and languages to fear and tremble before the God of Israel[n]" — — — Let us then rise to the occasion: let us unite as one man: let us not merely *issue the decree*, but *do the thing*; providing all the means for it, and carrying into effect the objects we profess to aim at. Thus shall we indeed approve ourselves good and faithful servants to our God, and be rewarded by him according to our improvement of our respective talents — — —]

[n] ver. 25, 26.

DXCVI.

THE REIGN OF THE SAINTS.

Dan. vii. 18. *The saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.*

THE vision of Daniel contained in this chapter accords with that which had before been vouchsafed to Nebuchadnezzar, and interpreted by Daniel himself[a]. To Daniel it had appeared as a great image, the various materials of which denoted four successive kingdoms, which would yield at last to one universal empire established on their ruins. To Daniel it appeared as four wild beasts, which would successively prevail; till at last the kingdom of the Messiah should be erected, and reduce every adverse power to a state of complete subjection. To Nebuchadnezzar, who saw nothing but glory in the rise and fall of empires, the idea of a glorious image was most suited: but to Daniel, who viewed the malignant dispositions which produced such revolutions, and the miseries that were produced by them, they were more fitly represented under the notion of wild beasts, tearing and devouring one another. But in the vision of Daniel there were revealed many additional circumstances, which very greatly interested him, and which he earnestly desired to have explained. The last of the four kingdoms was to be broken into ten smaller kingdoms, represented by ten horns; amongst which "a little horn, that had eyes, and a mouth speaking very great things," grew up. This little horn (which seems evidently to denote the Papal power)

[a] Ch. ii. 31—45.

power) was to make war with the saints; and, after grievously afflicting them for 1260 years, to be itself destroyed, and the kingdom be given to the saints.

On that part of the subject that relates to the little horn, we shall be silent; because the stating of different opinions respecting it would be unprofitable to those who are hungering for the bread of life: but that part which is contained in our text will be edifying to us all: we shall proceed therefore to consider,

I. The event predicted—

The establishment of the Redeemer's empire upon earth is that which is foretold in the preceding verses[b], and which in reality is meant in the passage now before us. But the kingdom is called the kingdom of the saints, because it will be entirely composed of saints, and altogether under their government[c]. That they shall possess it we can have no doubt; and when the time shall arrive, so universal will the reign of piety be, that it will appear as if all the saints who have ever lived upon earth had risen again, and as if Christ himself had come down again from heaven to reign over them[d]. But respecting the saints there are two things which it will be proper to shew;

1. How they will take possession of the kingdom—

[They will *not* do this *by force*, unless indeed by the holy violence of faith and prayer: in that respect "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force:" but in respect of any exertion on their part to usurp dominion, it will not so much as enter into their minds. Divine grace will have taught them to "be subject to the powers that be; and *that* not only for wrath, but for conscience sake." If they lived even under a Nero, they would, notwithstanding all his cruelty, regard him as God's Minister, whom, by any other means than those which the law itself admits, they are bound not to resist[e]. No man can act as becometh a saint, if he be not found amongst those that are "quiet in the land."

It is through the intervention only of God's power that they are

[b] ver. 13, 14. [c] ver. 22, 27. [d] Rev. v. 10. & xx. 4.
[e] Rom. xiii. 1—5.

are exalted to posts of honour, and invested with authority over their fellow-creatures. In the days of old, the enemies of God were overruled to execute his will, in the elevation of a Joseph and a Daniel to the command of mighty empires, and of the Hebrew youths to the government of extensive provinces: but at the time to which our text refers, the subjects, as well as the governors, shall all be converted to the faith of Christ: kings, no less than others, shall submit to the authority of Christ; yea, "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him." There will not need any human efforts to subvert the government of the ungodly: God himself will change, not the persons, but the principles, of those who are in the seat of judgment; and will press into his own service all their faculties and all their powers. Thus without any public commotions will the work be effected: "The stone that will break in pieces all adverse powers will be cut out *without hands*;" and the kingdom will be erected, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."]

2. How they will administer it—

[In this they will differ widely from the monarchs of this world: they will consult, not their own will, but the will of their heavenly Father; and seek, not their own glory, but his. Every nation will have a theocracy, such as obtained in the days of Moses, and of the Judges. Men will be invested with authority indeed; but the Lord Jesus Christ will be the one Head over all: his laws will be the ground-work of every law that shall be enacted, and his glory the end of every ordinance that shall be administered. "Kings will be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and queens her nursing-mothers." Judges and Magistrates will distribute justice with the utmost possible fidelity, all in their several places "fearing God and working righteousness." All the minor offices in the State shall be executed in like manner with the strictest integrity: "officers of every description will be peace, and exactors righteousness:" "no violence of any kind will be heard[f]" in any of the departments of civil government; nor will any interest be consulted but that of the whole community.]

Such is the event which in God's own time we assuredly expect: and from the description already given it is easy to anticipate,

II. The advantages that will accrue from it—

Let us notice,

1. Those of a temporal nature—

[The first that occurs to our minds is this, that there will be no more *foreign wars*. The history of the world for four thousand years has been little else than a recital of murderous and desolating

[f] Isai. lx. 17, 18.

desolating wars: but in that day, we are told, that "swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not rise against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." What a blessing this will be, can scarcely be estimated by us, who have for so long a period been exempt from the horrors of war; but in those countries where its desolating progress has been felt, this will appear a blessing of no small moment. As "wars will cease among the nations of the earth," so in the different nations there will be no *domestic feuds*. "Judah will no more vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah." "The wolf and the lamb shall dwell together" in perfect harmony: the noxious qualities of the human heart shall be universally restrained: love alone will reign in every circle: "they shall not hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, because the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea[g]." We may further add, that in that day there will be no *personal wants*. Now a great portion of the human race are oppressed with want, so as scarcely to know how they shall provide bread for the morrow: but in that day it will be as on the day of Pentecost, not literally indeed, but in effect, all delighting to supply the necessities of their fellow-saints. As in the wilderness "he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack," so in that day will "the abundance of some be a supply for the want of others, that, as far as will conduce to the welfare of the whole, there may be equality[h]."]

2. Those of a spiritual nature—

[Vast will be the increase of *light* in that day: "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days." Hitherto the greatest part of the world have sat in darkness and the shadow of death: but then "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" and such shall be the fruit of their exertions, that "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea." The diffusion of Divine knowledge will then be a national object: men shall not then be "put into the Ministry to supply them with a piece of bread," but "to feed the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers:" and Patrons will exercise their power for God, to provide the people with "pastors after God's heart." The people also, whilst flocking to the church "as doves to their windows," will so receive the word, that it will universally "have free course and be glorified amongst them."

Together with light, there will be among all classes a great augmentation of *peace and joy*. "The sun shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and their

[g] Isai. ix. 6—9. [h] 2 Cor. viii. 13—15.

their God their glory." Nor shall their joy be so variable as at present: "their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light; and the days of their mourning shall be ended[i]." To this happy state of the Church shall the reign of the saints essentially contribute: for the zeal of the pastors, the spirituality of the people, and the more abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men, will all conspire to "turn the wilderness into a garden, and to make the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose: yea, it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing[k]."

There will also be a far larger measure of *holiness* pervading the world. The Canaanite will then "be no more in the land." "The people will be all righteous[l]:" and surprising will be the beauty and fertility of every plant which the Lord hath planted[m]. To this also will the reign of the saints greatly contribute. Sin of every kind will be discountenanced, and iniquity, if any still exist, will be constrained to hide its head———]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none be ashamed of being accounted saints—

[This name, which God so highly honours, is with many a term of reproach. But happy are they who are "counted worthy of this shame." The day will ere long arrive, when they shall have far higher honours than man can bestow. We who are now alive may not live to see the day predicted in our text; but, if not, we shall see a happier day, when, "having suffered with Christ, we shall reign, and be glorified together with him." Verily for all the saints there is a kingdom provided; and they who look forward to it shall not be disappointed of their hope[n]———]

2. Let all endeavour to help forward the expected day—

[God will make use of instruments, just as he did in the Apostolic age: and we apprehend he is evidently preparing the way for the fuller diffusion of his Gospel by the various efforts which his people are now making in every quarter of the globe. He is causing his word to be translated into the different languages of the world, that all may be able to "read in their own tongue the wonderful works of God." He is sending forth Missionaries into different and distant parts; and is uniting myriads of people in the blessed work of instructing the benighted heathens. Let all these works then be dear to you; and help them forward to the utmost of your power: so may we hope that ere long "the crooked places may be made straight, and the rough places plain, and that all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

[i] Isai. lx. 19, 20.
[k] Isai. xxxv. 1—6, 10.
[l] Isai. lx. 21. & Zech. xiv. 20, 21.
[m] Hos. xiv. 5—7.
[n] 2 Tim. iv. 8. Rev. iii. 21.

DXCVII.

DANIEL'S CONFESSION.

Dan. ix. 3—7. *And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer, and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes: and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy unto them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the Prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day.*

FROM the earliest period, even from the time that God first had a visible Church in the world, there have been particular seasons set apart for humiliation, and fasting, and prayer. In the Christian Church, the appointment of forty days at this part of the year (Lent) for that purpose is of great antiquity[a]. The two days with which this season commenced were observed with peculiar solemnity: the one (Shrove Tuesday) was spent in recollecting and confessing[b] their sins; the other (Ash Wednesday) in fasting and supplication. That these institutions were carried to a very foolish excess, and that they degenerated into very absurd superstitions, under the reign of Popery, is readily acknowledged: but they were good in their origin; and our Church has wisely retained such a portion of them as might tend to the real edification of her members: and if we were more observant of them than we are, we should find substantial benefit to our souls. But, alas! we have run into an opposite extreme, insomuch that not only the observances are laid aside, but the very intention of them is almost forgotten: and instead of complying

[a] The number of days for fasting was not always precisely the same as now: but the appointment itself may be traced almost to the times of the Apostles.

[b] The word "*shrove*" is from the old English word "*shrive*," which signifies, *to confess*.

complying with the design which is intimated in the names given to the days, we render them perfectly ridiculous, by substituting a trifling change in our food for the most solemn acts of devotion before God[c].

Hoping however that on *this* day we are disposed to humble ourselves before God, we shall,

I. Illustrate this confession of Daniel—

The manner in which he made his supplications is deserving of particular attention—

[He "set his face unto the Lord God:" he did not rush into the Divine presence without any previous meditation, but endeavoured to have his mind impressed with reverence and godly fear, that he might "not offer to his God the sacrifice of fools."

He "sought God by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." By mortifying the body, he endeavoured to aid the labours of his soul. Both the one and the other had been defiled by sin; and therefore he strove to make them partners in humiliation before God. Nor can we doubt but that the fervour of his prayers was greatly assisted by the bodily privations which God himself has so often prescribed for this very end.]

Nor must we overlook *the remarkable representation which he gave of the Divine character* on this occasion—

[He mentions in very expressive terms both *the Majesty* and *the Goodness* of God; the one for the abasing, the other for the encouraging, of his soul.

What words can more strongly paint *the Majesty* of God? In various other passages, God is called "the great and terrible" God[d]: and well may he be addressed in such terms; for "who knoweth the power of his anger?" Let us only call to mind the judgments he has executed on sinners; on the rebel angels; on the antediluvian world; on Sodom and Gomorrah; on the Egyptian first-born; on Pharaoh and his hosts; yea, on the Jews

[c] This is evident from the customs of having salt fish on Ash-Wednesday, and pancakes on Shrove Tuesday. The latter in all probability arose from the people being reminded, or perhaps summoned, by a bell, to confess all their sins, πᾶν κακόν. From hence it was called the πᾶν κακὸν, or *pan-cake* bell. Alas! how widely have we deviated from the intention of those who first enjoined the observance of that day!

[d] Neh. i. 5. & ix. 32. & Deut. vii. 21.

Jews in Babylon, which was the point referred to in the text; and we shall confess that "God is very greatly to be feared."

Yet he was not unmindful of the Divine *goodness*. Notwithstanding God is angry with the wicked, he has "made a covenant" with his Son, wherein he engages to "shew mercy unto all who love him and keep his commandments." Now this covenant he has never violated; this mercy he has never refused to one who by faith laid hold on that covenant, and shewed forth his faith by his works. And Daniel mentions this, in his address to God, as the ground on which he presumed to approach him, and ventured to hope for acceptance with him.]

His confession before him is also worthy of notice, as being expressive of the deepest humility and contrition—

[So deeply did he bewail his own sins and the iniquities of his people, that he strove by the most diversified expressions to make known his hatred of them: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments; neither have we hearkened to thy servants the Prophets, which spake in thy name."

Here he distinctly acknowledges to God *their transgression of his commandments*, and *their contempt of his reproofs*. These were indeed a just ground for his humiliation; since to no other nation had such a revelation of God's will been given, or such messages of mercy sent. Happy was it for him, and happy for the nation, that the reason of their chastisements was thus discovered; and that, by knowing wherein they had erred, they had learned wherein they were to amend their conduct!]

There is yet one thing more on which we must make our remarks, namely, *his justification of God in all his dealings with them*—

[Nothing but equity is ascribed to God; nothing but shame is taken to themselves; "O Lord! righteousness belongeth unto thee; but unto us confusion of face." He does not utter one word in extenuation of their guilt, or one complaint against the Divine judgments: he declares rather, that, to whatever extremities God might proceed, he could not but be righteous; and that, whatever mercies they might experience at his hands, nothing but the deepest self-abasement could ever become them. Thus he gives the most decisive evidence of true repentance, and exhibits an admirable pattern for penitents in all ages.]

Having briefly illustrated this confession on Daniel, we shall,

II. Found

II. Found upon it some suitable and appropriate observations—

1. We have the same sins to confess—

[Without entering into any distinctions founded on the different terms which are here accumulated, let us only take the general division before mentioned, and call to mind *our transgression of God's commandments*, and *our contempt of his reproofs*.

Which of the commandments have we not broken? We may perhaps imagine, that, though we may have violated some, we are guiltless respecting others. But, alas! if we take our Saviour's exposition of them, and remember, that an angry word is murder, and an impure look adultery, we shall find reason to bemoan our transgression of them all — — —

Nor is it any small aggravation of our guilt that we have despised those warnings and invitations which he has sent us in the Gospel. The Ministers of Christ have testified against our ways from sabbath to sabbath, and from year to year: yet how few have "hearkened to their voice!" how few have turned from their evil ways! how few have heartily embraced his salvation, or devoted themselves unfeignedly to his service! Let us in particular enter into our own bosoms, and consider what improvement WE have made of the truths delivered to us — — — If we do this in sincerity, we shall be at no loss for matter of humiliation before God.]

2. We have the same God to go unto—

[We do not like to think of God's *majesty*; but he is, as much as ever, "a great and terrible God:" the Apostle justly observes, "Our God is a consuming fire." Let us not dream of a God *all* mercy: the Deity is just as well as merciful; and it will be found "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" — — —

On the other hand, the *goodness* of God is unalterable. He is still merciful to all who lay hold on his covenant; and will assuredly fulfil to them all the promises of that covenant. Heaven and earth may fail; but not a jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail — — —

Let us entertain just conceptions of the Divine character; and we shall have a frame of mind suited to our condition; we shall be under the joint influence of hope and fear; of hope without presumption, and of fear without despondency.]

3. We ought to approach him in the same manner—

[We should carefully prepare our minds for communion with God. The neglect of this is the reason that we so seldom obtain real fellowship with him. We should not lay aside, as it is to be feared we do, the duty of fasting: we should set

apart seasons for more than ordinary humiliation; and more especially improve those seasons which are set apart by public authority.

We should search out our iniquities with diligence: and, instead of leaning to the side of self-vindication, should learn to justify God and to condemn ourselves. Nor shall we ever have our hearts right with him, till we can say, "God will be righteous, though he should cast me into hell; and nothing but confusion of face will become me, even though I were as holy as Daniel himself."

Let us then begin the employment this day, under a full assurance, that "he who thus humbleth himself under the mighty hand of God, shall in due time be lifted up."]

DXCVIII.

THE ANSWER TO DANIEL'S PRAYER.

Dan. ix. 17—23. *O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hearken, and do! defer not, for thine own sake, O my God! for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth; and I am come to shew thee: for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.*

AN inquiry into prophecy is highly commendable; and more especially now that so many prophecies are on the very eve of their accomplishment. But it is not by study alone that we shall be able to attain the true interpretation of the prophetic writings. We must pray to God to reflect the true light upon them, and

and to enable us by his good Spirit rightly to apprehend them. This was the way which Daniel took, when he saw, by the writings of Jeremiah, that the seventy years of captivity were drawing to a close[a]: he could not tell the precise time from which they should be numbered; and consequently could not ascertain the period for their termination: but he was anxious to know when the happy time was to commence. He set himself therefore to study the prophecies of Jeremiah, and to seek instruction from God in a way of humiliation and fasting, and prayer[b]. The success which he met with deserves particular attention, inasmuch as it affords an encouragement to all to follow his example. Let us consider,

I. The record here given—

In this are two things to be noticed;

1. The prayer of Daniel—

[To enter into this aright, the whole chapter should be attentively perused. The first thing that strikes us in this prayer is, *his just views of the Deity;* of his *majesty*, as a "great and dreadful" God; his unchanging *faithfulness*, in "keeping covenant and mercy to his loving and obedient people[c];" his *justice*, in all the judgments that he inflicts on the disobedient[d]; his *mercy*, in pardoning those who have rebelled against him[e]; and his *truth*, in executing every word that he has ever spoken[f]. From this comprehensive view of the Divine perfections arose that just mixture of humility and confidence which is visible throughout the whole of his address.

The next thing to be observed in Daniel's prayer is, *his deep humiliation before God.* On the subject of his own and his people's sins, he so accumulates expressions as to shew that he thought he could never sufficiently abase himself before his God[g] ——— In a word, nothing but shame and "confusion of face" seemed to him to be suited to his condition as a sinner; though of all the saints in the Old Testament he seems to have been the most perfect; not one thing during the course of a long, and public, and laborious life being laid to his charge, either by God or man.

His earnest pleadings with God are yet further deserving of especial regard. He seems as if he would take no denial, yea, as if his spirit could brook no delay[h]. Every thing that might be supposed to influence the Deity is brought forward as a plea, to

[a] Jer. xxix. 10. [b] ver. 2, 3. [c] ver. 4. [d] ver. 7.
[e] ver. 9. [f] ver. 11, 12. [g] ver. 5, 6. [h] ver. 19.

to incline him to have mercy on his afflicted people: the consideration of God's former mercies to them in Egypt[l]; a regard for his own honour, since they still bare the same relation to him as ever[k]; and a love to the promised Messiah, whose glory would ultimately be promoted by it[l]. All these pleas shew how earnest and importunate he was, even like Jacob when wrestling with the Angel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."]

2. The answer given him—

[How marvellous was the condescension of God, in sending the angel Gabriel to give unto his servant an answer of peace! But here it will be peculiarly profitable to compare the answer with the prayer:—"O Lord, hear! O Lord, defer not!"—"Go Gabriel; fly with all possible expedition: do not so much as look back to behold my glory: mind nothing but your errand: tell him, in answer to what he is saying, 'To me belongeth shame and confusion of face,' 'O Daniel, thou art greatly beloved.' In answer to his request, that 'I would not defer,' tell him that at the very beginning of his supplications the commandment was given thee to go and answer them from me: and, whereas he has only prayed for information respecting the redemption of my people from Babylon, which Jeremiah predicted to be wrought in the space of seventy years from the time of his prophecy; tell him of that infinitely greater redemption which that typifies, and which is now to be accomplished in seventy weeks of years; explain to him every thing relating to the vicarious sufferings of the Messiah, and the righteousness which He will bring in thereby for the deliverance and salvation of a ruined world[m]. And let this answer be to all the future generations of mankind a memorial of my grace, and a pledge of my condescension to all my praying people."]

Instead of dilating much on the circumstances of this instructive history, we have merely glanced at them, that we may more largely dwell upon,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Behold then here,

1. The nature of prayer—

[Prayer is an application of the soul to God for some desired blessing. But it will be proper distinctly to notice its constituent parts.

There must be, in the first place, *a just apprehension of the Divine perfections*. If we view not God as a Being of infinite majesty, and holiness and power, we shall not approach him with that reverential fear that becomes us: and if his goodness, and mercy, and truth, and faithfulness be not borne in mind, we shall

[l] ver. 15. [k] ver. 19. [l] ver. 17. [m] ver. 24—27.

shall be destitute of all those encouragements that are necessary for the support of our souls. The greatest of men must never for a moment forget the former, nor the vilest of men the latter. Abraham, Moses, Job, Isaiah, were all abased, as it were, in dust and ashes, by their discoveries of God; whilst, on the other hand, the very murderers of the Lord of Glory had in one moment their terrors dissipated, and their souls revived, by a single glimpse of God, as reconciled to them in Christ Jesus. A partial view of God will lead either to despondency or presumption; but a just view of him will call into exercise all the best feelings of the heart, combining activity with confidence, and fear with love[n] — — —

Next, there must be *a contrite sense of our own extreme unworthiness.* No prayer can come up with acceptance before God, which does not proceed from a broken and contrite spirit. Angels who have never fallen may offer praises without any other kind of humiliation than that which proceeds from a sense of their utter meanness and insignificance; but a sinner, though redeemed, must never forget that he is a sinner, or neglect to blend contrition even with his most exalted services. In heaven itself the Redeemed cast their crowns before the Saviour's feet, in acknowledgment that they receive them altogether from him, and that they desire to wear them only for the advancement of his glory[o] — — —

Connected with our contrition there must be *an earnest pleading with God.* This is the very soul of prayer. True it is, that God does not need to be prevailed upon by our importunity, as though he were of his own nature backward to assist us; for to exercise mercy is his delight: but he requires importunity in us, as the means of exciting in our hearts, and of evidencing in our prayers, a deep sense of our need of mercy[p] — — —

But that which gives to prayer its chief efficacy is, *a humble affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Our blessed Lord tells us, that "whatever we ask *in his name* we shall receive." It is his mediation alone that procures acceptance for our prayers: and then only do they come up with a sweet odour before God, when they are presented in his censer, and are perfumed with the incense of his prevailing intercession[q].]

2. Its efficacy when duly offered—

[God will not cast out the prayer of faith: but his answers to it shall be *sure, speedy,* and *effectual.* "Never said he to any,

[n] Here a distinct view may be taken of all the perfections before mentioned.

[o] Here the nature of real humiliation may be more fully traced, in reference to that of Daniel.

[p] This also may here be briefly illustrated.

[q] Here it may be shewn what attention is paid to this throughout our whole Liturgy.

any, Seek ye my face in vain:" and the accumulation of promises which he has given us on this subject, leaves us no room to doubt, but that he will grant us, in answer to our prayers, such blessings as he knows to be best for us[r]. If he give us not the thing we asked for, he will give us that which on the whole is far better, and which, if we had known what was best for us as he does, we should have asked. The time previous to his answer may appear to our impatient minds long: but his answers shall not be protracted beyond the fittest season. The parable of the unjust judge shews us, how the importunate widow prevailed at last: and the instruction which God founds upon it is this: "Shall not God avenge his own elect who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them *speedily*," i. e. as speedily as will conduce to their greatest benefit. Moreover, his answers shall be commensurate with all our necessities. However "wide we open our mouth, he will fill it." David says, "I cried to the Lord; and the Lord heard me *at large*:" thus will he hear *us* at large, "supplying all our wants according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," and "giving us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."]

ADDRESS—

[Let every one in his place and station be as Daniel, a man of prayer. Others besides Daniel have had immediate answers to prayer[s]: and God promises that we also shall be answered as speedily as ever Daniel was, if it will really be for our good[t]. If any one be discouraged for want of an answer to his prayers, let him remember, that God may have answered them already, though unperceived, and in a way not contemplated by the suppliant himself. An angel, is mentioned by the prophet Zechariah as answered, not in the way that he had desired, but "with good and comfortable words[u]." And Paul, when praying for the removal of the thorn in his flesh, had it not removed, but sanctified, and grace given to him to improve it aright[x]. Know then, whether you see it or not, that God both does, and will, answer your petitions. Only let them be humble, and believing, and they shall never go forth in vain.]

[r] Matt. vii. 7, 8. [s] Acts x. 30, 31. [t] Isai. lxv. 24.
[u] Zech. i. 12, 13. [x] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

DXCIX.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH PENITENTS.

Hosea ii. 14, & part of 15. *Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her: and I will give unto her vineyards from thence, and the Valley of Achor for a door of hope.*

WHOEVER is at all conversant with the holy Scriptures, must know, that they are, in many parts, highly figurative. If we examine many of our Lord's expressions, and indeed some whole discourses, we shall see, that they were unintelligible to those who interpreted them only according to their literal meaning; because they were intended to be understood in a mystical and spiritual sense: hence our Lord took occasion to inform them, that the words which he spake unto them were "spirit and life." This is yet still more observable in the Prophetic Writings, which almost always must be taken in a mystical, as well as literal, sense; and indeed in many places, as Bishop Lowth has well observed, the spiritual meaning is more true, and more immediately intended, than the literal. This, I apprehend, is the case in the passage before us. God has been declaring, what he would do in order to reclaim the ten tribes from their idolatries; that he would "hedge up their way with thorns, and make a wall, so that they should not be able to find their former ways," i.e. (as it is more fully set forth in the 13th and five following verses) that he would deprive them of all their national blessings, and deliver them into the hand of their Assyrian enemies: then, in my text, he adds, "Therefore (it should rather be translated, '*nevertheless*') I will allure her," and so on. He had, in ver. 7, mentioned, that in consequence of the obstructions which he would put in their way, they should be brought to see their sin and folly, and to say, "I will return unto my first husband:" and now he proceeds to declare, how he would deal with them, when they should be brought to that frame of mind;

mind; that he would "allure her, and give her the Valley of Achor for a door of hope." Now this has never been *literally* accomplished: for, if we except about 12,000 Israelites, who accompanied the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in their return from the Babylonish captivity, none of the ten tribes have ever yet returned to their native country. We must therefore look for a spiritual sense to this passage: and here we have the authority of an inspired writer to interpret it, as relating to the conversion of the Gentile world, and the deliverance of God's chosen people from a state of bondage to sin and Satan. St. Paul, in Rom. ix. 25. speaking expressly on the call of the Gentiles, quotes the last verse of this chapter in Hosea, and declares that this prophecy then received its completion. We may therefore without hesitation consider the passage as declaring the manner in which God deals with his penitent and contrite people: when once the Church, or any individual in it, is so wrought upon by temporal calamities or spiritual convictions, as to say, "I will go and return unto my first, my rightful Husband," God says, as in my text, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her; and I will give her vineyards from thence, and the Valley of Achor for a door of hope." In declaring from hence how God will deal with his returning people, we may observe, that he will encourage them,

I. With *present comforts*—

[The readiness of God to receive sinners is not discovered in any thing more than in his mode of dealing with them in their return to him: if there be only "*some good* in them," he is sure to notice it with some testimony of his approbation: in proportion as they advance towards him, he makes greater advances towards a reconciliation with them: and when he sees that they begin in earnest to seek his face, he will cause them to abound in consolations. "He will allure them:" We must not suppose that God will really deceive any one; but yet there is a sense wherein he may be said to "allure" men: he will conceal from the view of penitents such things as might alarm and terrify them: he will feed them, while they are yet babes, with milk; and will withhold the

the stronger meat, which they are not yet able to digest. There are many things which he will say to them at a future period; but from which he diverts their attention at present, as from things which they cannot receive: and thus he leads them gently, as their strength will bear. He now also in a peculiar manner reveals himself to the soul, and fills it with heavenly delight. The sinner coming first to a sense of God's favour, is borne up, as it were, on eagles' wings: he seems to be breathing a purer air; I had almost said, to be living in a new world. His sensations are so entirely changed, that one may, almost without an hyperbole, call him "a new creature:" from being dead as to all spiritual things, he begins to enjoy a spiritual life: from being in total darkness, he is "brought forth into marvellous light:" from dreading God's displeasure, he feels "his love shed abroad in his heart." Now therefore he supposes he never can lose the savour of these things: "Am I a dog," thinks he, that I should ever more offend this gracious Being, who has thus freely forgiven all my trespasses? Alas! little knowing what depravity and deceitfulness there is in the human heart, he concludes that he shall now bear down all before him: the corruptions of his own heart seem to be so mortified, as to be almost extinct: the world now is as nothing in his eyes: and Satan himself, formidable as he is, now appears to be "bruised under his feet." Perhaps he has learned, as it were by rote, to acknowledge himself weak, frail, and inwardly depraved; but the frame of his mind is like David's, when he said, "My mountain is so strong, I shall never be moved." Thus does God *allure* penitents: nor is this any more than what is necessary at the first; for their habits of sin are deeply rooted; their attachment to the things of time and sense is very strong; and the opposition they will afterwards meet with from the world, the flesh, and the devil, is so powerful, that they need all possible encouragement; they need time to get strength; they need to taste the sweetness of religion now, in order that when they come to endure the cross they may be able to testify, from their own experience, that religion, with all its difficulties, is an incomparably better portion than the world. This was remarkably exemplified at the first publication of the Gospel: the three thousand converts "continued daily with one accord in the Temple, and ate their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and *having favour with all the people.*" The favour of man they had very little reason to expect: but God saw fit to keep his infant Church for a little time from persecution, in order that their happiness might have no alloy, and that they might grow in strength, and be able to endure it afterwards, when it should come upon them: and thus he allured them, as it were, to a steady and resolute adherence to his cause.

Further, God says, "I will bring her into the wilderness." Many able and judicious Commentators translate these words somewhat differently, "I will allure her *after I have brought* her into the wilderness:"

wilderness;" and this I should suppose to be the more proper rendering of the words, because the sense is then clear; viz. "After having afflicted her for her sins, I will comfort her on her return to me." But, if we retain the present version, we must understand the 'wilderness' to mean, not a state of affliction, but a state of solitude and retirement: and this makes very good sense, and exactly agrees with the experience of young Christians. When God allures them in the manner we have before represented, they immediately forsake the company of the world, and seek their God in retirement: they now love solitude; they now never feel themselves less alone than when alone; nor would they forego their secret intercourse with God for all the world. There are many seasons when they would account the presence of their very dearest friend to be a grievous interruption. But, however true the words are in this sense, I apprehend the other to be the better version of them; and therefore passing by this, we observe further, That God will speak comfortably to those whom he thus allures. He makes his word now to be exceeding precious to their souls: he opens their understandings to understand it; and they begin to hear God speaking in and by it: and oh! how delightful are the promises! With what eagerness do they embrace the promises! with what unspeakable pleasure do they now apply them to themselves! Under a sense of guilt, they now see that they may have pardon for sins of the deepest dye: under a consciousness of their own insufficiency for any thing that is good, they see here in the Sacred Records an inexhaustible treasure of grace and strength. In every situation and circumstance of life they find, that there is a word suited to their condition: they hear the voice of God in the Promises; and by these he speaks indeed most comfortably to them. There is somewhat peculiar in the original words: literally translated, they mean, "I will speak *to her heart*:" and this is very properly rendered, "I will speak *comfortably* to her;" for God speaks to the outward ears of thousands to very little purpose: he invites, but they are not intreated; he promises, but they are not comforted: but, when once he speaks to *the heart*, then comfort flows in apace, and "they rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified."]

Thus we see how God, alluring the sinner, and speaking comfortably to him, leads him on by present comforts. We proceed to shew, how he encourages him,

II. By *future prospects*—

[He that is born of God is indeed born to a great inheritance: nor is he in danger of expecting too much at the hands of God; for, as he has said in general, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it," so he says in the passage before us, "I will give her vineyards from hence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope."

hope." You will call to mind what was observed in the beginning of this discourse, that this passage was never literally fulfilled, and that St. Paul has explained it in a spiritual and mystical sense: and this we now repeat, lest our construction, or rather our application, of it should appear fanciful or forced. Vineyards were a very important part of the produce of the land of Canaan; insomuch, that when the spies went to search out the land, they brought back a cluster of grapes upon the shoulders of two men, as the best proof of the fertility of the soil. When the Lord therefore promises to give his people "vineyards from thence," he means by it a supply of every temporal blessing, which he will bestow upon them from the very instant that they thus return unto him. If therefore we apply this *spiritually*, we may understand by it a supply of all spiritual blessings, which God will vouchsafe to his people from the time that they come to him with real penitence and contrition. Just as when our Lord says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water:" (by which he meant all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit:) so, I apprehend, when God says in my text, "I will give her vineyards," he means every kind of temporal and spiritual blessing. It is added further, "I will give her the Valley of Achor for a door of hope." Achor was a very rich valley, so called from the circumstance of Achan being stoned there. It was the first portion of the Promised Land that came into the possession of the Israelites: and this was to them a door of hope; it was a ground of assurance, that they should in due time possess the whole land: it was, as it were, an earnest, whereby they were taught to expect the fulfilment of all the Promises. Here then we see the meaning of the passage before us, according to the spiritual interpretation of it: God promises to his people the richest spiritual blessings; and teaches them to consider all which they here possess, as an earnest only of what they shall hereafter inherit. Now it is by this prospect of receiving all *spiritual* and *eternal* blessings, that the young Christian is encouraged to proceed.

First, *He has a prospect of all spiritual blessings.*—The Believer soon finds, that, if he will be faithful to his God, he must forego some worldly advantages; and sacrifice every interest that stands in competition with his duty. Now this to our earthly hearts is no little trial: those who are insincere cannot stand this test: like the young man in the Gospel, they may wish for an interest in Christ; but, if they must sell all in order to obtain it, they will rather part with Christ and his benefits: yea, if for a season they make a profession of godliness, they will at last, like Demas, prove by their conduct that they are "lovers of this present evil world." But, as an antidote against this poison, God promises that he will give better riches, even "durable riches and righteousness;" and, that the blessings which he will bestow,

shall

shall far more than counterbalance any thing which can be lost for him: and thus he inclines the soul to suffer temporal loss, in expectation of greater spiritual advantage; and, as he did the saints of old, to "take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they have in heaven a better and an enduring substance." The Christian also, after a little time, begins to find that he has many sore conflicts to maintain; that he has enemies on every side: that he has temptations without number; and that he has in himself no strength, either to withstand one temptation, or to overcome one enemy. Under such circumstances, he would soon faint and be weary, but that God has engaged to support him in every trial, and make him conqueror over every enemy. But when he knows, that "his strength shall be according to his day;" that there shall be "no temptation without a way to escape;" and that every conflict shall produce an abundant increase of grace and peace; he is willing to engage his enemies, under a full assurance, that, while God is for him, he need not regard any that are against him. He has already found the blessedness of serving God: he knows, by his own experience, that God "never is a wilderness unto his people;" that he is a gracious master, who richly repays them for whatever they may do or suffer in his cause. Having therefore experienced this, he looks forward with confidence: having obtained grace in past trials, he expects assuredly, that it shall be given him in future difficulties: having tasted how gracious the Lord is, he expects to receive yet richer communications of peace and joy: he looks upon every thing he receives as an earnest of something future.

In addition to spiritual blessings which he hopes to receive in this life, he has *A prospect also of eternal blessings in the life to come:* his increasing conformity to the Divine image is a door of hope, that he shall one day be "holy as God is holy:" his increasing happiness gives him a lively assurance, that he shall ere long be free from every care, and be happy as the angels that are around the throne: so also the sweet communion which he enjoys with God in secret, those discoveries of his glory, and those communications of his love, are as earnests that he shall one day see God face to face, and "drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand, for evermore." Now this contains somewhat of the Christian's experience, when first he comes to God through Christ: he is led on at first by present comforts; and, as he proceeds, his prospects open; so that in an assured expectation of grace sufficient for him, and of a crown of glory at the end, he "goes on, conquering and to conquer."]

We will now conclude with an ADDRESS—

1. To those who may now be enjoying their first love—

[The prophet observes, that the time of espousals is a time of

of love (Jer. ii. 2.): and in the Letter to the Church of Ephesus, mention is made of a first love; by which is meant, that peculiar earnestness and delight in Divine things which are often to be observed in young converts. Now it may be, that some of you who are here present have just begun to taste the joys of religion: you have peace with God in your consciences; and can scarcely think of any thing but the goodness of God to your souls. I would to God this might always remain; or rather, that it might increase more and more; and that you might so learn divine lessons in prosperity, as not to need to learn them in a more humiliating way! But this is very rarely the case: the deep things of God are scarcely ever learned in this way: in general, God, after a season, leaves the soul to discern its own depravity, and to feel its utter helplessness: and, in order to humble it in the dust, he suffers the latent corruptions of the heart to spring up, and thus to harass and defile the soul. Not that God acts thus from any pleasure which he takes in mortifying the soul: I am persuaded he would rather overcome us by love, because "he delights in the prosperity of his people:" but this is the way in which he punishes our past sins, and our present neglects; he suffers those very sins, which most dishonoured and provoked him in our unregenerate state, most to grieve and perplex us after our conversion: and every secret backsliding he punishes, by withdrawing in a measure his restraining grace; so that, as the prophet says, "Our own wickedness corrects us, and our backslidings reprove us." You must not wonder therefore, if this should be your own experience: and this I say, not to damp your joy, so much as to keep you from abusing it. Strange as it may appear, our hearts will sometimes take occasion, even from religious joys, to puff us up with pride, or to lull us into security: and wherever pride or security is, no doubt there will ere long be a fall. Remember then, that these comforts which God vouchsafes you, are to be an occasion of gratitude, but not of pride; "a door of hope," but not of presumption. When once you begin to presume upon your attainments, and to think that less diligence, less watchfulness, and less fervour will suffice, be assured, that the blessings you so abuse will be withdrawn: you will find, that your gifts, your graces, and your comforts, will decline. Be on your guard then against "leaving your first love:" be sober, and watch unto prayer: and, if you find but the first beginnings of decay, oh! flee to the Saviour; flee to him as for your lives: if you feel yourselves sinking, cry to him, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" and endeavour, "as ye have received the Lord Jesus Christ, so to walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."].

2. Those who have "left their first love"—

[Perhaps you will ask, "Who are they? and how shall I know

know whether I be of the number?" Beloved, this is no hard thing to know. It is true, there may have been some abatement with respect to rapturous or extatic feelings, while yet your love remains as firm as ever: but yet all who are really walking nigh to God, find the text realized in their own experience. God allures them by the consolations of his Spirit; he seals his promises on their hearts: he enriches them with gifts and graces; and he opens glorious prospects to their view. If therefore, instead of being thus allured, your spirit is become dull; if, instead of finding the promises precious to your soul, they scarcely ever dwell upon your mind, or administer any solid comfort; if your gifts or graces decline, instead of increasing; and if, instead of looking for, and longing after, and hasting to, your heavenly inheritance, you are becoming more forgetful of it, and ready, as it were, to take up your rest in earthly things, Thou art the man: whoever thou art, "I have somewhat against thee;" "Thou hast left thy first love." Oh! "turn and repent, and do thy first works." See what has caused this declension in thy soul: see what there is that troubles the camp: and oh! put away the accursed thing: if thou hast given way to a worldly spirit, watch and pray against it: if pride have defiled thy soul, humble thyself for it before God, and beg for grace, that thou mayest "be clothed with humility:" if passion be thy besetting sin, pray that thou mayest "put on meekness as the elect of God," and be adorned with that "meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price." If sloth be the enemy that hath cut thy locks, and shorn thy strength, up, up, and be doing: in short, whatever it be that has caused thy declension, sacrifice it, though it be precious as a right eye, and necessary as a right hand." "Cease to do evil, and learn to do well: put away the evil of your doings:" I know indeed, that you cannot put it away of yourselves; but I know at the same time, that, till it be put away, God will not shed abroad his love in your heart, nor can you look up with comfort and confidence to him. "Turn ye then unto your God, from whom you have deeply revolted;" and know, that he is a God ready to pardon: "he will heal your backslidings, and love you freely:" he will give you the earnest of his Spirit in your hearts, and fill you with joy in expectation of the full inheritance. Oh Beloved! say with the Church of old, "I will go and return unto my first Husband; for then it was better with me than now:" and you will find, that, as "he hateth putting away," so "He will cast out none that come unto him."]

DC.

GOD BETROTHING US TO HIMSELF.

Hos. ii. 19, 20. *I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies: I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord.*

THE more accurately we trace the change experienced by a renewed soul, the more we shall be disposed to ascribe all the glory of our salvation to God alone. We shall find that the first stirring of holy desires is wrought in us by the operation of his Spirit; that every subsequent endeavour is rendered successful only through his almighty aid; and in short, that the whole work, in its beginning, continuance, and consummation, is purely the effect of grace. This every real Christian is as much assured of, as he is of his own existence. Not even those who have made the highest attainments have been able to discern any goodness or power in themselves whereto they could attribute it: all without exception have confessed with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." To the covenant-engagements which God from eternity made with us in his Son, and which he confirms to us when he calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light, must every thing be referred, even to that source which is pointed out in the words before us.

In contemplating the engagements which God enters into with the believing soul, we shall be led to set before you,

I. The nature of those engagements—

[There are various figures used in Scripture to represent the care which God will take of his people; but that which is the most endearing, the most honourable, and perhaps I might add, the most frequent of any, is a marriage-covenant. The Old Testament abounds with expressions to this effect. Isaiah says, "Thy Maker is thy Husband." Jeremiah has whole chapters addressed to the Church as an adulterous Wife, and inviting her to be reconciled to her Divine Husband. Hosea not only delivers messages in similar terms, but was actually commanded of God to take an adulteress (i. e. either one who had been so, and was

now penitent, or one who, though chaste at the time of his union with her, afterwards proved abandoned,) to be his wife, in order that he might be a visible sign unto the Jewish nation. The New Testament also, less frequently perhaps, but not less plainly, sets forth God as bearing this relation to his Church. St. Paul, after speaking much concerning the duties of husbands and wives, breaks off abruptly, and informs us, that, "great as the mystery is, he has been speaking of Christ and the Church." Now we cannot conceive any figure more suitable to express the relation between God and the Church than this: for, while it puts the highest honour on the institution of marriage, it conveys to us the liveliest sense of God's tenderness and love towards us. The relation of husband necessarily implies that he is engaged to love, provide for, and protect her, to whom he is so related; and all this, yea, infinitely more, is implied in this relation as subsisting between God and the Church. The prophet in the short space of my text repeats the idea of espousals no less than three times; "I will betroth thee, yea, I will betroth thee, I will even betroth thee;" so that we seem called upon, as it were, to expatiate upon the term, and to trace the agreement between the term itself, and that which is signified by it: but we rather choose to drop the comparison, and to notice that peculiar circumstance of it which is mentioned in the text, viz. that it is an everlasting espousal, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever." God had formed a covenant of this nature before; but it was only a temporary covenant; and, as the continuance of it depended on the faithfulness and obedience of his Church, it is no wonder that it was often violated, and the relation itself dissolved. But the covenant which God now enters into with his believing people, is altogether spiritual: in this, God himself undertakes to perform every thing in, and for, his people, and thus to secure their fidelity to him, as well as his promises to them; so that this union must be indissoluble and eternal. The prophet Jeremiah speaking on this subject, says, (xxxi. 31—33.) "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was *an Husband* unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: *I will put my law* in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and *will be their* God, and *they shall* be my people." So again, (xxxii. 40.) "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Thus the marriage contract between God and the soul shall not be dissolved by unfaithfulness on the part of the Church; for though unfaithfulness,

if

if unrepented of, would dissolve it, yet God will so constrain the soul that it shall not prove unfaithful: yea, so far from being dissolved even by death itself, it shall then be fulfilled more strictly than ever. At present, the Church is only, as it were, betrothed; but at the last day every thing will be ready for the consummation; and then the glorified saints and angels will exult in a more peculiar manner. St. John, speaking of this in Rev. xix. 7. represents them as saying, "Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his Wife hath made herself ready." Thus we see that the engagement which God enters into with every believing soul is nothing less than an everlasting espousal.]

We come next to consider,

II. The manner in which they are performed—

[The manner of effecting our espousal to God, as far as it relates to the Believer's experience, is very different in different persons: some are drawn with love, whilst others are driven by fear: but, as far as it respects the Divine conduct towards us, it is invariably the same; "He betroths us to himself in righteousness, in judgment, in loving-kindness, in mercies, and in faithfulness:" in the works of creation and providence the wisdom and power of God are chiefly seen; but, in his espousal of the believing soul, every perfection shines with equal and united splendor.

First, "He betroths us in *righteousness*."—We are ready to say, "How can it be that God should unite himself to such an unholy soul? Surely it would be a reflection on his purity: if he could love me to such a degree as to betroth me to himself, he must evidently shew, that he has no great aversion to sin: if I were righteous, he might very well confer this honour upon me; but seeing that I am so vile, he cannot do it consistently with his own righteousness." So flesh and blood would argue: but God has taken care to cut off any ground for such imputations; yea, he has provided that his righteousness may be signally manifested in this very way. By making Christ the propitiation for our sins, and sending his Spirit to renew us after the Divine image, he has perfectly satisfied his own justice, and renders us meet to become his Bride. This is a thought in which St. Paul rejoiced and gloried: when he had occasion to mention it, he repeats it again and again; he dwells upon it, as though he knew not when to leave it: in Rom. iii. 21—26, he mentions it a great many times; and in the 25th and 26th verses more especially, he says, that "God set forth his Son to be a propitiation for this very purpose, to declare his *righteousness*;" and again, "to declare, I say, his *righteousness*, that he might be *just*, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

Next, "He betroths us *in judgment*."—We shall not trouble you

with the various senses which Commentators affix to these words, but give you that which we apprehend to be the best. It must seem strange, that God should act in this manner towards his fallen creatures; yea, it is indeed so unaccountable to dark and depraved reason, that many do not hesitate to condemn it all as folly and enthusiasm. But "the foolishness of God is wiser than man, as much as his weakness is stronger than man." What God does, he does in *judgment:* it is not an hasty inadvertent act, but the result of mature deliberation. Long before man existed, even from all eternity, this was determined by God, that after mankind should have fallen and reduced themselves to the most abject state imaginable, he would bring them back again to a state of holiness and happiness, by taking them into nearest union with himself. What though we cannot assign reasons for such conduct, must it therefore be unreasonable? Who are we, that we should be able to fathom all the Divine counsels, and to call God himself to our tribunal? Let us silently adore what we cannot fully comprehend; knowing with the Apostle, that, in conferring this honour upon us, "he hath abounded towards us in all *wisdom and prudence;*" and that "he predestinated us to it according to his own good pleasure which he *purposed in himself,*" and which he executed after "*the counsel of his own will.*"

He betroths us also *in loving-kindness.* In vain might we hope to find any thing in ourselves whereto we might ascribe the distinction shewn us by the Almighty: "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" nothing which could in any wise induce God to set his love upon us. We were lying in our blood, says Ezekiel, (xvi. 6, 8.) when he looked upon us, and bid us live: yea, then it was that "he sware unto us, and entered into covenant with us, and we became his." The only source therefore of all which we receive at his hands is, his own love: "He is love;" he delights in shewing love; and he chose us to stand in that relation to him, on purpose that his loving-kindness might ever be exercised towards us. "He loved us," says the prophet, "with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn us." (Jer. xxxi. 3.) What was said by Moses to the Jewish nation is applicable, in a far higher sense, to Believers under the Gospel dispensation; "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth, The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more (or better) than other people, but because the Lord loved you." And this is the very cause to which St. Paul himself ascribes the honour conferred upon us: it was, says he, (Eph. ii. 7.) "that he might shew the *exceeding riches of his grace,* in his *kindness* towards us by Christ Jesus."

Further, he betroths us *in mercies.* This, though nearly allied to the former, is by no means the same: in *that* he acts towards

us as undeserving creatures; in *this*, as deserving of his wrath and indignation. It is very little to say of fallen man, that he has no goodness: if we would speak the whole truth, we must say, that man, even in his best state, is an exceedingly guilty and depraved creature; but, as unregenerate, he is full of all iniquity, and more desperately wicked, than either words can express, or heart conceive. But God, when he determines to become our Husband, determines at the same time to cover all our faults, and pardon all our iniquities. He is not like us on earth, who unite ourselves to persons that afterwards turn out quite contrary to our expectations: he both knows what we are, and what we shall be: and yet, foreseeing all the evil we shall commit, he determines to unite us to himself, and to make us his for ever. Not but that he hates iniquity, and will punish it; nevertheless, "He will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss;" and, as for habitual and allowed wickedness, he will take care that no such shall be found in his Spouse: he will take care that "she shall be all glorious within; and that her clothing shall be of wrought gold." And this is provided for in the marriage covenant itself: for, as he says, in a fore-cited passage, that he will write his law in our hearts, so he adds, "and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more."

Lastly, he will betroth us *in faithfulness*.—It is said before, that the espousals shall be for ever: but, if the continuance of the union depended on our obedience, certain it is that the covenant would be soon broken, and all our hopes would be destroyed with it. But God has undertaken to "perfect that which concerns us:" there can be no doubt but that we must be holy, yea, that we must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would receive a crown of life:" but then God has engaged to "carry on his work" in our hearts, and to "keep us by his own power, through faith unto salvation." And here it is that the Apostle lays the stress both of his own hopes, and of the hopes of all Believers: he speaks of himself as "in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, had promised;" and he tells us also, for our comfort, that "He is faithful who hath promised." Thus then we see the manner in which God performs his covenant engagements to us; he does it in righteousness and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies, and in faithfulness; so that, as there is an harmony of various and even opposite attributes in this glorious work, we may safely commit our souls into his hands, and trust him to accomplish his own gracious and eternal purposes.]

We come now to consider,

III. The fruit produced by them—

[The text informs us, it is this; "We shall know the Lord." Till we come to experience somewhat of his love in uniting himself to us, we are unacquainted with him: we may have heard somewhat

somewhat of his perfections, but we can have no real knowledge of him. It is common amongst us to say, that we cannot know each other till we come to live together: and this is certainly true *for the most part* amongst men; but it is *universally* true with respect to God. We can know nothing of his love, his power, his grace, till we have lived in a state of union with him. The unconverted "world judge him to be altogether such an one as themselves:" but when we know him aright, we know that light and darkness are not more opposite than He is from the natural man: we then see that "his ways are in no respect as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." Moreover, the longer we have been united to him, the more we grow in the knowledge of him. The grand point wherein the fathers in Christ differ from the young men, or children, is, in that "they know more of Him that is from the beginning." Indeed, a real knowledge of God can only be obtained from experience: and that experience too must be daily renewed; for it is not with this as with other knowledge: other knowledge, after having gained it, we may retain by the force of memory; but this no longer abides with us than while we are walking closely with God: it comes to us, and is continued with us, in the exercise of faith: it is faith only that views him aright: while therefore we are strong in faith, there will be no command which we shall hesitate to fulfil, nor any promise at which we shall stagger: convinced that he is ours, we shall want no more: in short, it is said, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee:" and this is God's end in all his dispensations, namely, that we should be brought to this knowledge, and be disposed to yield up ourselves to him without reserve.

But it is not the knowledge of God in this world only that is the effect of his engagement to us: we shall be further led by it to the knowledge of God in the eternal world. Present benefits, however great, would not have been an adequate and sufficient end for God to have proposed to himself when he entered into this engagement with us: and therefore he looked forward to the eternal world, that the knowledge which we had obtained in this life might be advanced and perfected in the next. *Here*, notwithstanding the condescension of our Divine Husband, and the holy familiarity to which he admits us, we know very little of his perfections, and very little of his mysterious dealings with us: they who know the most of him have seen only his back parts: but *there* we shall "see him face to face;" we shall see him as we are seen, and "know him as we are known:" yea, I doubt not but that to all eternity we shall be growing in the knowledge of him. And all this we shall receive as the fruit and effect of that engagement which God entered into, when he said, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever"———]

We

We will now conclude with two INFERENCES from what has been said—

1. How great are the honour and happiness of the true Christian!

[We are ready to envy those who are a little elevated above their fellow-creatures by earthly titles and distinctions: but how vain and insignificant are such distinctions! How little can they do to make us holy! how little to make us happy! How short and transitory are they in their duration! and in every respect how unworthy are they of that idolatrous affection and eager solicitude with which they are sought! But this honour which cometh of God is infinitely more worthy our attention: to be betrothed to the Most High is indeed a distinction which we may well covet: *that* is durable; *that* is effectual to the best of purposes; *that* will make us new creatures; *that* will bring us into an acquaintance with our God; *that* will secure an eternity of bliss. Oh, Christian, how highly art thou favoured! how art thou exalted! What an unspeakable honour is this, to be able to look up to heaven, and to say with humble confidence, "My Maker is my Husband!" Oh! admire the goodness of God towards thee; and endeavour to walk worthy of thy high calling. Let not the Spouse be found acting unsuitably to her high station. Remember that now the honour of God is intimately connected with thy conduct: let not therefore these high pretensions appear to the world a mere empty boast; but let all men see, by your holy dispositions and heavenly affections, that you are indeed living only for Him who hath brought you into the bonds of an everlasting covenant. Know that from henceforth it is your privilege to live entirely by faith on Christ: you are, as St. John repeatedly speaks in the Revelation, "the Lamb's Bride:" though therefore you have nothing of your own but "filthy rags," you may expect at his hands a pure unspotted robe: though you have no wisdom or strength of your own whereby you may conduct yourself in a way suited to your high condition, you may ask of Christ, and he will give you liberally and without upbraiding. Though you are still enslaved by many vile habits and depraved affections, you may look to him, and he will make you free indeed: yea, he himself will be your "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Oh! bless your God for these things; and, whenever any thing else solicits your affections, remember who alone has a right to them: remember what judgment and righteousness, what mercy and loving-kindness, what truth and faithfulness, have been manifested on his part; and "as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation."]

2. What encouragement is here for all men to repent!

[If

[If we could look into the book of God's decrees, and see for certain that our names were not written in the Lamb's book of life, we might well sit down in despair. But that is mercifully hid from us, so that none can possibly know for certain that he himself is in a state of final reprobation. On the contrary, the Gospel gives encouragement to all; to all of the vilest description that can be imagined. Let any one only read the third chapter of Jeremiah, and see if he can picture to himself a state worse than is there described, or conceive promises more full and free than are there held forth: if we have played the harlot with ever so many lovers, or dealt ever so unfaithfully with our Husband, still the command given to the prophet is this (ver. 12); "Go and proclaim these words, and say, Return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you:" and again (ver. 14); "Turn, O backsliding Israel, for I am married unto you:" and again (ver. 22); "Return, ye backsliding Children, and I will heal your backslidings." So, to those in the text, God says no less than three times, "I will betroth thee, I will betroth thee, I will betroth thee." And why is this so often repeated, but because God knows how backward we are to believe the tidings of his grace and mercy? "He speaks once, yea twice, and man perceives it not:" therefore he will confirm it to the very uttermost; yea, he has even confirmed his promise with an oath, as the Apostle tells us, "That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, *they* may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us!" "Reject not then the counsel of God against yourselves." "Believe in the Lord, so shall ye prosper: believe his Prophets, so shall ye be established!"

Beloved Brethren, God has made ample provision for you in the Gospel: he has provided a Saviour for the remission of your sins: he has provided the gift of his Spirit to renew and sanctify your hearts: and all he offers to you, together with himself. He will deal bountifully with you. All he requires is, that you should give him your hearts; and then all that he is, and all that he has, shall be yours for ever. Oh! let these gracious tidings sink down into your hearts. I would now "espouse you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." Accept then his gracious offers. What he offers, he offers in judgment, well knowing that it will consist with his righteousness, and that his righteousness shall be even glorified in your salvation. His heart is full of love; his love has devised and executed the great work of Redemption, and is now ready to apply it to your soul. As for his mercies, they are infinite; they can extend to all sins, though they be of a crimson or a scarlet dye: and "faithful is He who hath promised, who also will do it." Accept then this free salvation; come to him by Jesus Christ; take him as your Husband; trust him for provision, protection, and whatever else you want:

then

then you shall soon "know in whom you have believed;" you shall know what a gracious and all-sufficient God he is; and from knowing and enjoying him on earth, you shall have the most intimate knowledge and fruition of him in heaven for evermore: which may God of his infinite mercy grant, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.]

DCI.

IGNORANCE DESTRUCTIVE.

Hos. iv. 6. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*

IGNORANCE, as it respects the things of this world, is attended with many evils. It disqualifies a man for those situations in life that require the exercise of wisdom and discretion: it degrades him in society below the rank of those who would otherwise be deemed his equals or inferiors: and it not unfrequently leads to idleness, dissipation, and vice. But ignorance of religion is of infinitely worse consequence; because it insures the everlasting destruction of the soul. To this effect God speaks in the words before us; from which we shall be led to shew,

I. The ignorance of the Christian world—

The Jews, as well those of the ten tribes as those who worshipped at Jerusalem, were called "the people of God," because they had received the seal of his covenant in their infancy, and professed to acknowledge him as their God. In like manner *we*, having in our infancy been baptized into the faith of Christ, may, in a lax and general sense, be called his followers, and his people. But among nominal Christians there is an awful lack of knowledge; an ignorance,

1. Of themselves—

[How little do they know of their *blindness!* They suppose themselves as competent to judge of spiritual as they are of carnal things; though God tells them, that they cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit for want of a spiritual discernment*.

How little do they know of their *guilt!* Do they really feel themselves

* 1 Cor. ii. 11, 14.

themselves deserving of God's eternal wrath and indignation? They cannot cordially acquiesce in that idea, notwithstanding they are expressly said to be under the curse and condemnation of the law[b].

How little do they know of their *depravity!* They will acknowledge, that they have this or that particular infirmity: but they have no just conception of the total depravity of their hearts; or of the truth of God's testimony respecting them, that "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is evil, only evil, continually[c]."

How little do they know of their utter *helplessness!*. They imagine that they can exercise repentance and faith just when they please, though they are declared by God himself to be incapable of themselves to do any thing[d], even so much as to think a good thought[e].]

2. Of God—

[They may have some general notions of his power and goodness: but what know they of his *holiness?* Do they suppose that sin is so hateful in his eyes as he represents it to be[f]?

What know they of his *justice?* Are they persuaded that, as the Moral Governor of the universe, he must enforce the sanctions of his own law; and that, however merciful he may be, he neither will nor can clear the guilty[g]?

What know they of his *truth?* They read many threatenings in his word; but they do not believe that he will execute them[h].]

3. Of Christ—

[They confess perhaps his Godhead, and acknowledge him as a Saviour. But what know they of him *as he is in himself?* Do they discern his beauty, his excellency, his glory? Is He in their eyes "chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely[i]?"

What know they of him *as he is to us?* Do they comprehend any thing of the breadth and length, the depth and height, of his unsearchable love[k]? Have they any adequate idea of his tender sympathy and compassion[l]? Have they been filled with an admiration of his fulness, his suitableness, his sufficiency[m]?

If more were necessary to confirm this melancholy truth, we would appeal to God's own assertion respecting us, that our stupidity and ignorance are more than brutish[mm].]

Lest such ignorance should be thought venial, we proceed to notice,

II. The

[b] Gal. iii. 10. [c] Ps. xiv. 2, 3. Gen. vi. 5. [d] John xv. 5.
[e] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [f] Heb. i. 13. [g] Exod. xxxiv. 7.
[h] Luke xvi. 17. [i] Cant. v. 10, 16. [k] Eph. iii. 18, 19.
[l] Heb. ii. 18, & iv. 15. [m] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[mm] Isai. i. 2, 3.

II. The fatal consequences of it—

Doubtless the degrees of criminality attached to ignorance must vary according to the opportunities which men have enjoyed of obtaining knowledge. But in all men who have the light of the Gospel set before them, a lack of spiritual knowledge,

1. *Tends to* their destruction—

[Every sin is destructive, but more especially impenitence and unbelief. And what is the occasion of these? Must they not be traced to ignorance as their true and proper source? If men knew what ignorant, guilty, depraved, and helpless creatures they are, could they refrain from sorrow and contrition? ——— If they knew what a holy, just, and immutable God they have to do with, could they do otherwise than tremble before him? ——— If they knew what a merciful, loving, and adorable Saviour there is, whose bowels are yearning over them, who is ever following them with invitations and intreaties, and who longs for nothing so much as to save their souls, could they turn their backs upon him? Could they help crying to him for mercy, and desiring an interest in his salvation? ——— If a man, feeling himself in imminent danger of perishing in the sea, cannot but avail himself of the assistance offered him for the preservation of his life, so neither can a man who feels his danger of everlasting destruction neglect and despise the salvation offered him in the Gospel.]

2. *Will issue in* their destruction—

[God himself best knows what he has ordained and decreed: and as the fates of men will be determined by him at last, to him, and to his word, we make our appeal.

We want to ascertain the states of those who are ignorant of the Gospel: God tells us plainly, "They are lost[n]."

We want to be informed whether their ignorance will not be considered as a sufficient plea for their rejection of the Gospel? God assures us, that instead of operating in that view, and to that extent, it shall itself be the ground of their condemnation[o].

We would fain hope that the Lord Jesus Christ will interpose for them at the last day, to avert or mitigate their sentence. But we are told, on the contrary, that he himself will come to judgment, for the express purpose of taking vengeance on them[p].

Here we leave the matter. If ye will not believe such plain and positive declarations of God, we shall in vain hope to make any impression on your minds by any feeble arguments of our own.]

INFER,

1. How carefully should we improve the means of grace!

[The

[n] 2 Cor. iv. 3. [o] Isai. xxvii. 11. [p] 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

[The ordinances are appointed of God for our instruction in spiritual knowledge. Should we then absent ourselves from them on slight occasions? or should we be content with a formal attendance on them, while yet we derive no solid benefit to our souls? O let us remember that our *all* is at stake: and whether we hear, or read, or pray, let us do it as for eternity.]

2. How earnestly should we pray for the teachings of God's Spirit!

[Whether we be learned or unlearned, we can know nothing but as we are taught of God. In respect of spiritual knowledge, the rich have no advantage above the poor: yea, the poor have rather the advantage of the rich, inasmuch as they have more docility of mind; and God has promised to reveal to babes the things which are hid from the wise and prudent[q]. Let us then beg that our eyes may be opened, and that through the influences of the Spirit we may know the things which are freely given to us of God[r].]

3. How thankful should we be for any measure of divine knowledge!

[To be wise unto salvation is to be wise indeed. All other knowledge is as nothing in comparison of this. Blessed then are they who can say, "This I know, that, whereas I was blind, I now see[s]." Yes, Believers, "blessed are your eyes, which now see:" for if ignorance is destructive to the soul, knowledge, on the other hand, provided it be spiritual and practical, will surely save it[t].]

[q] Jam. ii. 5. Matt. xi. 25. [r] 1 Cor. ii. 11. Eph. i. 18.
[s] John ix. 25. Matt. xiii. 16.
[t] Isai. liii. 11. John xvii. 3. with 1 John ii. 3, 4.

DCII.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF BACKSLIDING.

Hos. iv. 16. *Israel slideth back, as a backsliding heifer.*

SUCH is the influence of bad example, that it is extremely difficult to withstand its attractions, even at the time that we behold its fatal effects. Israel, or the ten tribes, from their first apostacy under Jeroboam, were irreclaimably addicted to idolatry. The prophet finding his efforts vain with respect to them, turns to Judah, and intreats that they would not

not tread in the steps of Israel[a], who, like an untamed and refractory bullock, had entirely cast off the yoke, and refused all subjection to Jehovah.

Humiliating as this account of Israel is, it is but too just a representation of the Christian world, whose conduct is utterly unworthy of the name they bear, and from whose ways we cannot stand at too great a distance.

To impress this awful truth upon your minds, we propose to shew,

I. When we may be said to resemble a backsliding heifer—

We owe submission to our heavenly Master; but give too much reason for the comparison in the text. This resemblance may be seen in us,

1. When we will not draw in God's yoke at all—

[Unconverted men in every age and place are rebels against God[b]: and, though all are not equally profligate in their manners, all are equally averse to spiritual employments: the law of God is considered as imposing on them an intolerable yoke, to which they will not, they cannot submit[c]. They are indeed subjected to it against their will; but neither chastisements nor encouragements can prevail upon them to draw in it: on the contrary, like a ferocious bullock, they are insensible of favours, and they fret at rebukes[d].]

2. When we draw in it only by fits and starts—

[Many appear willing to obey God in a time of sickness[e], or after some signal deliverance[f], or under an impressive sermon[g], or during a season of peace and tranquillity[h]: but, as soon as ever the particular occasion that called forth their pious resolutions has ceased, or they find that they must suffer for Christ's sake, they forget the vows that are upon them, and return to their former state of carelessness and indifference[i]. They renew their resolutions perhaps at certain seasons; but "their goodness is as the morning dew, or as the early cloud that passeth away." Thus, like a heifer that will draw for one moment and will

[a] ver. 15. At Gilgal and at Bethel, where God had formerly been worshipped, idols were now set up. The prophet, exhorting Judah not to go to those places, calls Beth-el (the house of God) Beth-aven (the house of vanity).

[b] Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 4. Jer. ii. 31. & vii. 24. [c] Rom. viii. 7.
[d] Jer. xxxi. 18. [e] Isai. xxvi. 16.
[f] Ps. cvi. 12, 13. [g] Exod. xxiv. 3, 7. Jam. i. 24.
[h] Matt. xiii. 21. [i] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

will not the next, they are, in the strongest sense of the words, unprofitable servants.]

3. When we grow weary of the yoke—

[It is not uncommon for persons to go on well for a season, and yet draw back at last. They grow weary of *performing their duties*, of *exercising their graces*, of *mortifying their lusts*: If they maintain an observance of public duties, they become remiss in those of the family and the closet: their delight in the Scriptures languishes; their meditations are cold; their devotions formal. Their faith, their hope, their love operate with less vital energy; and their besetting sins, whatever they were, regain their strength, and resume their ascendancy. These are like a horse or bullock, which, after having yielded to the yoke for a season, becomes restive and ungovernable, and disappoints thereby the expectations of its owner.][*]

Lest the frequency of these characters should tempt us to think favourably of them, we proceed to shew,

II. The evil and danger of such a state—

We shall notice,

1. The evil of it—

[A backslidden state, in whomsoever it is found, is exceeding sinful; but in those who have made some profession of religion, it is attended with peculiar aggravations.

It is a contemning of God; of his Majesty, which demands our subjection, and of his mercy, which would accept and reward our poor services. And it is in this light that God himself frequently complains of it[k].

It is a justifying of the wicked; for it says to them, in fact, "I was once as you are, and thought I should become happier by serving God: but I find by experience that there is no profit in serving him; and therefore I am returning to your state, which is, on the whole, the happier and more desirable."

It is a discouraging of the weak. Little do false professors think how much evil they do in this way[l]. Many are induced to follow their example in some things, under the idea that they are innocent; and are thus drawn from one sin to another, till they make shipwreck of a good conscience, and utterly turn away from the faith.

And need we multiply words any further to shew the evil of backsliding from God? Well does God himself call it "a wonderful and a horrible thing[m]."]

2. The

[*] Numb. xi. 20. 1 Sam. ii. 30. & 2 Sam. xii. 10. Ps. x. 13.
[l] Mal. ii. 8. [m] Jer. v. 30.

2. The danger of it—

[*This is an iniquity which God marks* with peculiar indignation[n]; and never fails to visit it, sooner or later, with some awful token of his displeasure.

The first symptoms of declension lead, if not speedily mourned over and resisted, *to utter apostacy*[o]. The disposition to backslide will soon increase, till it become inveterate, and, unless by a marvellous interposition of God himself, incurable.

The misery that will be incurred by means of it will far exceed all that have been endured, if no profession of religion had been ever made. "If any man draw back," says God, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him:" he "draws back to certain and everlasting perdition[p]:" and "it would have been better for him never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn back from it[q]."

Let these consequences be duly weighed, and nothing need be added to shew us the importance of "holding fast our profession without wavering."]

To IMPROVE this subject, we shall,

1. Assist you in ascertaining your state before God—

[Since all are "bent to backslide" more or less, it is of great importance to inquire of what kind our backslidings are, and to see whether they are merely the infirmities of an upright soul, or the revolt of an apostate. It is indeed difficult to determine this with precision; yet something may be said to aid you in this inquiry.

Examine diligently the *cause*, the *duration*, and the *effects* of your backslidings. Those of the sincere arise from the weakness of their flesh, while yet their spirit is as willing as ever: but those of the hypocrite proceed from a radical disaffection to the ways of God. Those of the sincere continue but a little time, and are an occasion of greater diligence: those of the hypocrite remain, and become the habit of his soul. Those of the sincere humble him in the dust: those of the hypocrite produce a blindness of mind, a searedness of conscience, and a hardness of heart.

But though we thus discriminate for the information of your judgment, we recommend all to stand fast in the Lord, and to guard against the first risings of spiritual decay[qq].]

2. Give a word of counsel to those in different states—

[*Are you altogether backslidden from God?*[r] O return to him,

[n] Jer. ii. 19, 21, 22. [o] Prov. xiv. 14. [p] Heb. x. 38, 39.
[q] Matt. xii. 45. 2 Pet. ii. 21. [qq] Gal. vi. 9.

him, and take upon you his "light and easy yoke!" He invites you with all the tenderness of a father[r]; he declares himself exceedingly averse to punish you according to your desert[s]; and he promises to "heal your backslidings, and love you freely[t]."

Are you drawing in his yoke? Bless and adore your God, who has inclined and enabled you to do so. It is his power, and his power alone, that has kept you hitherto[u]; and therefore he must have all the praise. And in order to your continued stedfastness, reflect often on the evil and danger of backsliding; I may add too, on the comfort and benefit of serving God. Surely He is a good Master. Let but your hearts be right with him, and "none of his commandments will appear grievous to you[x]:" on the contrary, you will find that "*in* keeping his commandments there is great reward[y]," and that your labour shall not be in vain with respect to the eternal world. "Be ye faithful unto death, and he will give you a crown of life[z]."]

[r] Jer. iii. 12, 14, 22. [s] Hos. xi. 7, 8. [t] Hos. xiv. 4.
[u] 1 Pet. i. 5. [x] 1 John v. 3. [y] Ps. xix. 11.
[z] Rev. ii. 10.

DCIII.

SPIRITUAL DESERTION.

Hos. v. 15. *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.*

MEN, when they become Christians, do not lose any of their natural feelings, but they experience many sensations both of pleasure and pain, which are altogether new, and peculiar to themselves: when God lifts up the light of his countenance upon them, they possess the sublimest happiness of which our nature is capable, "a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not:" so also, when God withdraws the light of his countenance from them, they are made to feel the most exquisite sorrow, with which no temporal affliction, no bodily anguish, can be compared. This is the sorest chastisement which can be inflicted on a godly and ingenuous soul: yet sore as it is, the wickedness of our hearts too often makes it necessary for us; for this will often avail to humble the soul, when every thing else has been tried in vain.

Hence

Hence it is generally God's last resource: he uses various other methods, first to make his people holy, and to keep them vigilant: but when they are still remiss and negligent, he departs from them, and says, "I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith" or dependence. Thus he dealt with his people of old: he had told them, in ver. 12. that he would be to them as a moth, or as rottenness, to consume them: then, because they went to the Assyrian rather than to him for help, he told them, in the verse before my text, that "he would tear them, as a young lion teareth his prey:" and then he adds, as the sorest calamity of all, and as the only one which would produce the desired effect, that he would forsake them; "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."

From these words we will endeavour to shew you,

I. The nature of spiritual desertion—

[They who view God's dealings with the Jews merely as an history, will lose the most important benefits which the relation of them is intended to convey. There is a striking similarity and agreement between the dispensations of Providence and the dispensations of Grace; so that there can be no doubt but that the former were intended typically to represent the latter. And, in order to understand the Scriptures aright, we must interpret them according to this canon. The most sober and candid Expositors have agreed in this. The desertion spoken of in my text literally refers to the abandoning of the Jews to the power of the Assyrians and Chaldeans, till they should be brought to repent of their sins: and the return which is there foretold as the effect of this desertion, had its accomplishment in part under Ezra and Nehemiah; partly also on the day of Pentecost; but principally, we expect it to be fulfilled at a future period, when the whole nation shall "look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn." But we may with the utmost propriety take occasion from it to speak of spiritual desertion, which all the Israel of God in a greater or less degree experience. In my text, God says, "I will go and return unto my place:" this is a good description of that which we call spiritual desertion. God, properly speaking, is in every place; "he filleth all in all:" but yet, as to the manifestation of his presence, he is more particularly in heaven: "He is the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is

Holy; and he dwells in the high and holy place." "Heaven is his throne; and he humbleth himself when he beholdeth the things that are on earth." It is "the habitation of his holiness;" so that if, either for purposes of judgment or of mercy, he vouchsafe to visit the earth, he leaves, as it were, his proper place, and comes down to us. When he noticed the iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, he said, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done according to the cry which is come up unto me:" and, when he was about to punish the Jews, the prophet said, "Behold the Lord *cometh out of his place*, to punish the inhabitants of the land[a]." So when the Church prayed to him for the manifestations of his power, they said, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, and come down[b]!" Thus, in the New Testament, he is frequently said to come and dwell in his people. Thus, when he visits us, he comes out of his place; and, when he withdraws those visits, he "goes, and returns to his place." Not that he is really capable of moving from one place to another, because he is alike in every place; but, with respect to the manifestations of his presence, the communications of his grace, the supports of his arm, and the consolations of his Spirit, he may be truly said to move: for neither the presence nor removal of any thing can be more perceptible to the body, than the loss or acquisition of these things is to the soul. The way in which God withdraws himself from the soul, may be very fitly illustrated by the manner in which he forsook the Jews of old. The Shechinah, or bright cloud, was the symbol of the Divine presence; and *that* rested upon the ark between the cherubims. But when God was incensed against his people for their abominations, he gave them various warnings of his determination to forsake them, unless they should repent: he made his prophet therefore to see in a vision, what indeed all Israel, in the time of Moses, had seen with their bodily eyes,—his gradual departure. We have the account in the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of Ezekiel, to some verses of which we will refer you. In ix. 3. God is represented as taking his first step towards his departure; "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was, to the *threshold* of the house:" in x. 18. he removed still farther; "Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims," which were at that time, as we are told in ver. 3, and 4, standing in *the court*: in ver. 19, he went yet farther; "And the cherubims lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth, in my sight; and every one stood at the door of *the east gate* of the Lord's House, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above." In xi. 23. God goes to a yet greater distance; "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon *the mountain*, which is the east side of the city." See

[a] Isai. xxvi. 21. [b] Ibid. lxiv. 1.

See here, how many different removes there were, before God would utterly forsake them; first from the ark to the threshold; then to the court; then to the gate; and then to the mountain; and even there he stood, if that by any means they might humble themselves, and prevent his final departure. Now thus it is in his departure from the soul: when he sits enthroned, as it were, in the soul, all is well: the person thus highly honoured, is happy beyond description: his views of divine truth are clear, his apprehensions of it lively, and his enjoyment of it is unspeakably sweet and precious: having the light of God's countenance, and a sense of his favour, he has all that man can desire in this mortal state. But, when he becomes proud, or negligent, or worldly, when by any misconduct he begins to grieve the Holy Spirit, he soon perceives symptoms of the Divine displeasure: the effusions of Divine love in his soul are less abundant; his discoveries of the Deity are less glorious; his views and apprehensions are darker; his communion with God is less frequent, and less ardent; and his holy intimacy with the Deity is sensibly diminished. If he do not instantly take the alarm, and humble himself before God, and implore his pardon, he finds gradually a veil drawn between his God and him: he cannot have that access to God that he was wont to enjoy: he loses that enlargement of heart which he used to experience; his joys are in a great measure withdrawn: instead of abounding in praises, he finds it hard even to pray: it is comparatively seldom that he can break forth into songs of praise and adoration; and, if now and then he feel some elevation of soul, he cannot adore God for what he is in himself, but only for what he has done for us. Thus, ere he is aware, his God has withdrawn himself; and, if now he do not call him back by earnest supplication, and by renewed faith in Christ as his Mediator and Advocate, he will find every thing decay: the beauty of the summer will fade away, the autumnal gloom will soon succeed, and every thing will quickly wear a wintry aspect: all the graces of the soul will languish, and the corruptions of the heart regain their former ascendancy. The departing sun does not more surely change the face of nature, than the departure of God from the soul will leave it destitute and forlorn: so truly is it said, "Woe unto them, when I depart from them!" But these are, as it were, the steps by which God departs from the soul; and by these marks we may judge of his increasing nearness or removal.]

We see then what is meant by spiritual desertion—Let us now consider,

II. The end and intent of it—

[God intends our good in all his dispensations, unless indeed we have provoked him utterly to abandon us; and then he

may justly cause such events as shall open a way for the exercise of our corruptions, and for the consequent hardening of our hearts: but, till he has thus given us up, he designs all his dispensations for our good. Especially, in withdrawing from the souls of his people, he has a regard to their best interests: two principal ends which he would accomplish, are, To humble, and To quicken them.—First, to humble them; "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence." The confession of our sins is indispensably necessary, as well for our good, as for God's glory: however God may desire to pardon, he cannot do it, unless we be first disposed to confess: it would be unworthy of his majesty, and directly contrary to his word. He has said, that "he who covereth his sins shall not prosper;" and that he only "who confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy:" and his own honour is so interwoven with the abasement of the sinner, that, when Joshua exhorted Achan to confess his sin, he could use no terms more proper than these, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him." Indeed the good of man is no less concerned in the humiliation of his soul before God; for, till he be brought to a sense of his iniquities, he has no disposition to accept of mercy: he disdains to become a suppliant for it: he denies that he stands in need of it: he thinks himself affronted by the offer of it, because the offer necessarily implies, what he is utterly averse to acknowledge, namely, that he deserves punishment. This same pride remains, in a measure, in God's people after their conversion; and though they hate it and lothe themselves for it, yet, upon every fresh sin which they commit, they are but too apt to indulge it: they still feel an unaccountable backwardness to confess their sins, even though they know that God is privy to all, and needs not any information from them. When therefore God sees his people harbouring this pride in any degree, he withdraws himself from them: the more they indulge this vile principle, the more he testifies his displeasure, to shew them, that he will ever "resist the proud, and give grace only to the humble." He is determined "to abase those who walk in pride;" and therefore he never vouchsafes the former tokens of his love, till he has brought the soul to an open and ingenuous confession. We have a remarkable instance of this in David: he had grievously offended God in the matter of Uriah; but his proud heart would not humble itself before God. What was the consequence? God forsook him; and instead of speaking pardon and peace to him, he left his soul to be incessantly harassed with fruitless remorse and anguish; nor ever restored peace to his conscience, till he had humbled himself for his iniquity: Thus David says, in Psalm xxxii. 3, 4. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was turned into the drought of summer."

summer." This was his state while he persisted in impenitence: but as soon as he made confession, behold the change! "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and *so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin:*" and he who began the psalm with such a deplorable account of his experience, concludes it with saying, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."

A further end which God has in view is, To stir up the soul. His people are but too apt to grow remiss; and sometimes, when they profess to be seeking God with their whole hearts, they are secretly inclining to some earthly vanity. This, if suffered to prevail, would effectually alienate them from the life of God; they would soon be entangled again in the corruptions of the world; and "their last end would become worse than their beginning:" and therefore God in mercy withdraws himself from them; and hides his face, till they seek after him again with their wonted ardor. In this he acts, if you will permit me for once to use a very familiar illustration, as earthly parents do: the little child perhaps is loitering behind, and amusing himself with some trifling vanity: the parent calls and commands in vain: at last the parent, wearied with fruitless calls, conceals himself; and then the child is filled with anxiety, seeks his parent with tears, and is more solicitous to keep close to him in future. This is an humble illustration, I readily acknowledge: but it is a natural one; and our Lord himself did not disdain the use of such, for the confirmation of his doctrine: if it convey to you the idea more clearly than a plain statement would, my end is answered: let it shew you, what we are at present concerned to declare, the real end for which God hides his face from his children. We may however confirm this statement from the express testimony of God himself: "Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart; and I will be found of you[c]."]

III. We come now to shew the effect of spiritual desertion—

[Would to God that the effect were the same on all! but, alas! there are many who are hardened by it more and more, till God "swears in his wrath, that they shall never enter into his rest:" nevertheless, where the proper effect is produced upon the soul, it is that which is mentioned in my text; "In their affliction they will seek me early." This part of our subject is in a measure anticipated by what has gone before: nevertheless, it is of such importance as to deserve further and more distinct consideration. Prosperity does but ill suit with our fallen nature: not only temporal ease, but in some sense even spiritual pleasure, becomes a source of evil: not that it is so in itself; "the joy of the

[c] Jer. xxix. 13, 14.

the Lord is our strength;" but our corruption takes occasion from it to operate. Sometimes a long season of spiritual delight, and peculiar manifestations of God's love, shall foster pride: even Paul himself, from the abundance of revelations which were made to him, was in danger of "being exalted above measure," and needed "a thorn in his flesh" to keep him humble. So peculiar sensations of joy are sometimes the means of begetting security: we see daily that professors of religion are apt to look back upon former experiences, and to conclude that all *is* well, because it once *appeared* to be well: therefore God counteracts this propensity, and consults the good of his people, in withdrawing his sensible presence from them: he stirs them up to a holy vigilance against their spiritual enemies, and to a diligence and circumspection in his ways. See what was the effect produced upon the Spouse in the 5th chapter of the Song of Solomon: In the 2d verse, Christ, the Husband of the Church, is calling to her for admission; saying, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." She, not being disposed for heavenly communion with him, makes frivolous excuses: "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" Thus she provoked him to depart: presently, however, she rose to let him in; but behold, he was gone: In ver. 5, 6, "I rose up to open to my Beloved: I opened to my Beloved, but my Beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone." And now observe the effect of this desertion; "My soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." She then went about the city, and inquired of all the watchmen respecting him: and failing of success here, she says, in verse 8, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, tell ye him that I am sick of love." This is a striking comment on the last words of my text, "In their affliction they will seek me early:" and it exactly agrees with the experience of God's people in all ages: when they, who have been favoured with the light of God's countenance, are for a season deprived of it, they put away their foolish and vain excuses; they see that they must at all events get nigh to their Beloved; they will spare no pains; they will rather rise at midnight, than not seek him at all: they will attend the ordinances with redoubled diligence: they will inquire of the Ministers, the watchmen, how they may find him: they request the intercession of the saints: in short, they will never rest, till they have regained the sensible enjoyment of the Divine presence.]

Let us now come to a short APPLICATION of the subject,

1. To the careless world—

[My Brethren, many of you must be sensible that you never seek

seek the Divine presence: if you pray at any time, you rest satisfied with having performed a duty, and are not at all solicitous to obtain any manifestations of the Divine presence: yea, because you have never experienced any peculiar sensations of God's favour, you are ready to think, that all hopes of such experience are groundless, and that all must be either hypocrites or enthusiasts who pretend to such things. But surely, your own want of experience in these matters is no more a ground for denying the truth of what others feel, than your ignorance of other matters is a ground for denying what others know. Would to God that you would seek the Lord for yourselves! you should soon find that it is not in vain to call upon him. If you would humble yourselves, confessing your sins, and crying for mercy through the blood of Jesus, you should soon find that God is "gracious, and full of compassion, and rich in mercy unto all that call upon him:" he would be "a Father unto you; he would come unto you, and dwell with you;" he would "manifest himself unto you as he does not unto the world;" he would "shed abroad his love in your hearts;" and he would "make you glad with the light of his countenance." Oh, then, "seek the Lord, seek his face evermore!" Remember, it will be an awful matter to be banished for ever from his presence; to hear him say, "Depart, accursed:" how dreadful! On the contrary, how delightful to hear him say, "Come, ye blessed!" O "seek ye the Lord whilst he *may* be found; call ye upon him whilst he is near."]

2. To the professors of religion—

[How apt are you to draw back from God, instead of pressing forward as you ought to do! How do you compel him to hide his face, when he would gladly be comforting you with his presence! Ah, Brethren, know where the fault is: "He delighteth in the prosperity of his people:" it is wholly owing to yourselves, if ye do not "rejoice in the Lord all the day long." Do not then oblige him to withdraw himself; do not bring on yourselves so heavy an affliction: search, and see, what there is that has displeased him: see if the world has drawn you aside; see if pride has grieved his Spirit; see if negligence in secret duties has caused him to hide his face: and, whatever it be, confess it to the Lord; mourn over it; renew your application to the blood of Jesus; and press forward with greater diligence: so shall you "walk in the light, as He is in the light;" you shall have abiding and increasing fellowship both with the Father and the Son; and soon you shall be admitted into his immediate presence, where you shall never have one cloud to intercept your view of him to all eternity.]

DCIV.

MERCY BEFORE SACRIFICE.

Hos. vi. 6. *I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings.*

THERE is a disposition in every man to substitute external observances for the devotion of the heart; and to rest satisfied with rendering to God some easy services, while they are utterly averse to those duties which are more difficult and self-denying. But God cannot be deceived, nor will he be mocked. He will look at the heart, and not at the outward appearance only; and will mark with indignation the partial obedience of the hypocrite, no less than the open disobedience of the profane. It was thus that he dealt with his people of old, "hewing them by his Prophets, and slaying them by the words of his mouth," because they rested in their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, when he desired the more acceptable services of faith and love.

In this view the prophet intimates in the text,

I. The use of instituted ordinances—

The words of the text are not to be considered as importing that God did not require sacrifices at all, but as declaring his decided preference for spiritual obedience; just as our Lord's injunction, "not to labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto eternal life[a]," was not intended to prohibit the pursuit of earthly things, but only to enjoin a superior regard to the concerns of eternity.

God approves and loves the observance of his appointed ordinances—

[God appointed a great variety of ordinances to be observed: but the most important among them were "sacrifices and burnt-offerings." These he honoured with many signal tokens of his approbation. It is not improbable, that his acceptance of Abel's offering was marked by the descent of fire from heaven to consume it[b]. Certain it is, that on many other occasions God vouchsafed to men this testimony of his regard[c]: and in unnumbered

[a] John vi. 27. [b] Gen. iv. 4.

[c] To Moses, Lev. ix. 24. Manoah, Judg. xiii. 19, 20. Solomon, 2 Chron. vii. 1. and Elijah, 1 Kin. xviii. 38.

bered instances he imparted grace and peace to the souls of his people, while they presented their sacrifices before him.

Under the Gospel dispensation he has enjoined the public administration of his word and sacraments; and has crowned the observance of these ordinances with the brightest displays of his glory, and the richest communications of his love. He has promised his presence in them to the end of the world[d]; and *that* too in a manner and degree that we are not generally to expect it on other occasions.

Thus, both under the Law and under the Gospel, God has abundantly manifested his regard for the ordinances of his own institution.]

But the acceptableness of such services depends on the manner in which they are performed—

[God looks rather to the disposition of the worshipper than the matter of his offering; and, if a contrite spirit be wanting, he values nothing that such a worshipper can present. This is repeatedly and strongly declared[e]; and is as true under the Gospel as under the Law[f].

To this all the Scriptures bear witness. Balaam's answer to Balak[g], and Samuel's to Saul[h], and the discreet scribe's to Christ[i], all concur in establishing this point beyond a doubt.]

These considerations may well prepare us to acknowledge,

II. The superior excellence of vital godliness—

The view here given of vital godliness deserves attention—

[True religion, as it is experienced in the heart, consists in faith and love, or in such a "knowledge of God" as produces "mercy," both to the bodies and the souls of men. Our blessed Lord *twice* quotes the words of our text, and explains them in this very manner. He was vindicating on one occasion the conduct of his Disciples, for plucking some ears of corn on the sabbath-day. What they had done was certainly allowable on any other day, but probably not on the sabbath without some urgent necessity. Such a necessity existed in the present case: and as that plea was sufficient to vindicate David in a far more exceptionable violation of the law, and as it was acknowledged to be a full justification of the priests whose labours on the sabbath were very great, so it was a sufficient excuse for the Disciples, as their accusers would have known, if they had understood the meaning of the declaration in the text[k].]

Such

[d] Matt. xxviii. 20. [e] Isai. i. 11—14. & lxvi. 3.
[f] Ps. li. 16, 17. Matt. xv. 8, 9
[g] Mic. vi. 6—8. [h] 1 Sam. xv. 22. [i] Mark xii. 33.
[k] Matt. xii. 1—7. See also Matt. ix. 10—13, where our Lord adduced the same passage, in vindication of his own conduct in associating with sinners.

Such religion as is here described is far more excellent than any outward observances whatever—

1. This is valuable in itself; whereas they are valuable only in relation to the ends for which they were instituted—

[A "knowledge of God," and a delight in the exercise of "mercy" to the bodies and the souls of men, renders us conformable to the image of Christ: it constitutes our meetness for heaven, where both our knowledge and our love will be perfected. But the performance of ceremonies, as has already been shewn, is worthless, if it be not instrumental to the production of humiliation and affiance, of purity and zeal. Duties which do not bring us to God, and God to us, are good for nothing.]

2. This argues real conversion; whereas they will consist with the most ungodly state—

[No man can know God as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, or love his fellow-creatures for Christ's sake, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind. He may possess carnal wisdom, together with humanity and compassion, while he is yet unregenerate: but, if he have that faith and that love which are the essential constituents of vital godliness, he must have been born again; because he could not have these things, if they had not been given him from above. But any man may be observant of ceremonies; as the Pharisees themselves were, at the very same time that they were slaves of pride, of covetousness, and of hypocrisy.]

3. This invariably honours God; whereas they are often the means of greatly dishonouring him—

[The exercises of faith and love are but very partially seen by mortal eyes: their sublimer operations are known only to Him who beholds the secret desires of the soul. But that which is seen, compels men to acknowledge the excellence of true religion. Even the enemies of God are constrained to reverence the godly, and to admire the grace of God in them. But an attendance on ordinances is often substituted for the whole of religion; as though God were no better than an idol, either not discerning, or at least not regarding, the dispositions of the heart. Can a greater insult than this be offered to Jehovah? or can any thing reflect more dishonour upon him in the world[1]?

Let vital godliness be thus contrasted with outward observances, and the text will be seen in its full import.]

ADDRESS,

[1] Ps. l. 13, 14.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are regardless of even the forms of religion—

[It is grievous to see how the sabbaths are profaned, and the ordinances of the Gospel neglected. But consider, Brethren, what must be the consequence of defying God in this daring and contemptuous manner? Oh, that you would lay it to heart, before it be too late!]

2. Those who are attentive to the form, but regardless of the power, of religion—

[To those of your description, our Lord said, "Go, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:" and we repeat his words, "Go, and learn this." A clear view of this passage will undeceive you. While you are destitute of faith and love, or not living in the daily exercise of them, you differ but little from those whom we have before addressed. They are open sepulchres, that pour forth their nauseous vapours before all: and you are "whited sepulchres," that, with a fair outside, retain all that is filthy and abominable within. It is with such persons that God himself classes you now[m]: with such, if you repent not, you will be numbered to all eternity.]

3. Those who possess vital religion in their hearts—

[While the generality act as if form were *all*, you are too apt to act as if form were *nothing*. There is in this respect a great fault amongst the professors of the present day: they are too apt to come late to the House of God; and to be irreverent in their postures while the different parts of divine worship are performed; sitting at their ease, when they should be either devoutly kneeling in their supplications, or standing up to sing the praises of Jehovah. This gives occasion to the world to say of you, "*They mind the sermon, but care not at all about the prayers.*" Beloved Brethren, let there be no occasion for such a censure amongst us. It is dishonourable to our profession; it casts a stumbling-block in the way of the ungodly; and it is highly displeasing to our God. Where real necessity prevents an early attendance on God's worship, or infirmity of body requires an easy posture, the text applies in full force: but where these things do not exist, we must reverence the institutions of God and man: and the more humility we have, the more shall we manifest it in the whole of our deportment.]

[m] 2 Tim. iii. 1—5.

DCV.

OUR TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE COVENANT.

Hos. vi. 7. *But they, like men, have transgressed the covenant.*

THE merciful nature of God's dispensations greatly aggravates our guilt in violating his commandments. The law indeed which he imposed upon the Jews was in some respects an intolerable burthen; but in other points of view it was replete with love and mercy: for though its requirements were many, yet its provisions for the unintentional violation of its precepts were also numerous, and peculiarly suited to the character and condition of his people. He required of them sacrifices and burnt-offerings; but that which he principally desired, was the exercise of holy affections towards himself, and towards each other: and while they were observant of their duties, he pledged himself to watch over them, to protect them, to bless them. But they were by no means sensible of their privileges, or duly affected with his love: on the contrary, "they, like men, transgressed the covenant."

In the margin of our Bibles, the text is translated, "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant:" and this seems the more proper translation. The words which are translated, "like men," occur only in two other passages of the Bible: in one of which it is actually translated, "like Adam[a];" and in the other, that sense is evidently most agreeable to the context[b]. Thus in the text also it were far better to render the words, "They, *like Adam*, have transgressed the covenant." It is in this sense we propose to interpret them; and in this sense they are well applicable to ourselves. We shall take occasion from them to shew,

I. What covenants we have transgressed—

The peculiar covenant under which the Jews were, is altogether abrogated: and as we have never been under

[a] Job xxxi. 33.

[b] Ps. lxxxii. 7. "Ye shall die like *Adam*, whose honours were once so great, but were quickly ruined.

under it, we, of course, have never transgressed it. But we have transgressed,

1. The covenant of works—

[Under this covenant all are by nature: we are born under it: and it is as much in force against us at this time, as it ever was against those to whom it was first given. It requires perfect and perpetual obedience to the two tables of the moral law: and it denounces an everlasting curse against every the smallest violation of God's commandments[c]. It is needless to shew that we have transgressed this covenant; for there has not been one day of our lives, wherein we have not transgressed it in ten thousand instances.]

2. The covenant of grace—

[This is the new covenant which God has made with us, to remedy our breaches of the former covenant. The old covenant said, "Do this, and live;" but the new covenant says, "Believe, and be saved." It proposes to us a Saviour, who has made atonement for our sins, and wrought out a righteousness for us by his own obedience unto death. In, and through, Him reconciliation is offered to us; and God engages to restore to everlasting happiness and glory all who will come to him in the name of Christ.

Now one would imagine that all should eagerly embrace this covenant, and hold it fast, with a determination never to lose the benefits it so freely offers. But the fact is, that men are even more averse to this covenant than to the covenant of works. They cannot endure to depend so entirely on another for their acceptance with God. They think they can make some compensation for their violations of the former covenant, and in some way or other fulfil its conditions so as to secure its rewards. They perhaps will borrow somewhat from the new covenant, just to supply their deficiencies; but they cannot be prevailed upon to renounce the old covenant altogether, and to accept salvation by faith alone.

Let every one look back upon his past experience; and see whether he himself has not been leaning thus to something which he either has done, or has purposed to do, instead of prostrating himself at the Saviour's feet, and imploring mercy *solely* through his blood and righteousness? Yes; whatever we may imagine, this has really been the experience of every living man; such transgressors have we been against the new covenant itself, and against Christ the Mediator of it.]

3. The special covenants which we ourselves have individually made with God—

[In

[c] Gal. iii. 10.

[In our baptism we entered into covenant with God; and engaged to "renounce the Devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." At other times also, either at our confirmation by the Bishop, or at the Lord's Supper, or in a time of sickness, or under conviction of sin, we have resolved that we would repent, and turn unto God in newness of heart and life. But have not the practices of every day contradicted these professions? Have we not broken all our vows and resolutions? And have not the world, the flesh, and the Devil yet too great an ascendancy over our hearts? Behold then, "*We* are transgressors of the covenant;" and we have been "transgressors even from the womb."]

To discover more fully the guilt of violating the covenant, let us consider,

II. In what manner we have transgressed it—

The having "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" greatly enhances our guilt; since, in so doing, we have sinned,

1. Against the greatest obligations to obedience—

[The obligations which had been conferred on Adam in Paradise, ought to have kept him stedfast in his obedience. He was endued with faculties superior to any other Being upon earth. He was made capable of knowing, loving, and enjoying God; yea, was admitted to the most familiar converse with the Deity. But notwithstanding all these favours, he transgressed. Thus have we also done. Indeed the obligations conferred on us have been infinitely greater than any which Adam enjoyed, even in his state of innocence: for God has given us his only-begotten Son, to take upon him our nature, and to expiate our guilt by his own blood. Who can ever appreciate this favour, or compute its value? The tongue of an archangel cannot fully declare it; nor can any finite mind fully comprehend it. Yet, notwithstanding this obligation, we have sinned: yes; we have transgressed against a redeeming God; and have trampled on that very blood which he shed for our redemption. O what a fearful aggravation is this of all the guilt we have contracted!]

2. Against the strongest motives to obedience—

[Adam had not only his own salvation, but also the salvation of all his posterity, involved in his obedience. According to the covenant made with him, all his seed, to the very end of time, were to live in him, or in him to die. In this view it must be confessed, that his motives to stedfastness were more powerful than any which can operate on us; unless indeed we balance a regard for the Saviour's glory against his concern for his children's welfare.

But,

But, however this may be, our motives to obedience are unspeakably great: the everlasting happiness or misery of our souls is now at stake: heaven with all its glory, or hell with all its torments, must be our portion: and upon our present conduct our eternal state depends. Now can any one reflect a moment on these considerations, and not stand amazed that ever he should be induced to violate the covenant of his God? Is it not astonishing that any thing in the whole universe should prevail upon us to transgress under such circumstances, and to withstand such motives as these?]

3. Under the slightest possible temptations to disobedience—

[There was nothing wanting to Adam in Paradise that could at all conduce to his happiness. Nothing was denied him, but the fruit of one single tree, as a test of his obedience. And what temptation was this to him, who already possessed all that he could reasonably desire? But, slight as the temptation was, he yielded to it. And let us inquire, what our temptations are? A little money, a breath of honour, a momentary gratification, *this* is all that we can promise ourselves by transgressing the covenant: and what is this when set against eternity? What are we the happier at this moment for all our transgressions? what is left to us from them all, but shame and remorse? And have we any reason to expect that the gratification of sin in future will be more solid and permanent than those which we have enjoyed in times past? Behold then, this is the price for which we forego the hopes of heaven, and entail upon ourselves the miseries of hell! What desperate, what incredible infatuation!]

INFER,

1. How striking a contrast is there between God and us!

[We violate our covenant continually upon the most trifling temptations, and that too in spite of the strongest motives and obligations to the contrary. But does God ever violate his covenant? He has engaged to receive every returning Prodigal, that comes to him in the name of Jesus: and did we ever hear of so much as one whom he spurned from his footstool? He has engaged also to "keep the feet of his saints," and to "perfect that which concerneth them." And can we adduce one single instance of a *real* saint whom he has finally, and for ever, forsaken? No: he may have left hypocrites, to shew all that was in their hearts; and may have punished his own people with a temporary suspension of his favours; but "he has sworn once by his holiness that he will not lie unto David," or "cast off his people for ever:" and this covenant he never has broken, nor ever will. Yet what motives has he had, or what obligations have been laid upon

upon him, to keep covenant and mercy with us? Truly none. But has he not had temptations enough to abandon us? Yes; such temptations as none but a God of infinite perfections could have withstood. Every day, every hour, every moment, we have been provoking him to anger; but he is the unchangeable Jehovah, and therefore it is that we are not consumed.

O admire then the faithfulness of your God; and abase yourselves before him, as vile, faithless, and rebellious creatures!]

2. How thankful should we be for the covenant of grace!

[The covenant of works made no provision for one single breach of its commands: it instantly, and irreversibly, doomed the transgressor to destruction. But the covenant of grace makes provision for all the offences that ever were committed, provided we seek an interest in it. Here at this moment we may obtain all that we stand in need of. Here is pardon for all our sins; strength against all our temptations; peace to comfort us in all trials: in short, here is grace and glory, and whatever we can desire for body or for soul, for time or for eternity: and all is offered to us freely in the name of Jesus: we have only to believe in Jesus, and all is ours. O Brethren, be thankful for this "covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure;" and embrace it with your whole hearts. Then, notwithstanding your past transgressions of it have been more numerous than the sands upon the sea-shore, they shall all be forgiven; and you shall "stand before God without spot or blemish."]

DCVI.

THE FOLLY OF INCONSIDERATION.

Hos. vii. 2. *They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness.*

IT is certain that many who have the Gospel dispensed to them continue ignorant of its very first principles, and "perish at last for lack of knowledge." But there are still more who destroy their own souls through inconsideration. They will not attend to the things they do know, or suffer the principles they have received to have any influence upon their minds. Thus it was with Israel of old: they

they committed all manner of abominations[a], and, when God was desirous "to heal them," were bent as much as ever on the prosecution of their own evil ways[b]: and the reason of this is assigned by God himself in the words of our text: it is justly traced to their inconsideration; the *prevalence* and *folly* of which we propose to set before you.

I. The prevalence of inconsideration—

We propose not to speak of inconsideration at large, but only as it respects God's omniscience, and our accountableness to him.

It is an undoubted truth, that God "remembers all our wickedness"—

[*Reason* alone were sufficient to determine this point: for if God do not remember all the transactions of men, how can he judge the world?

If we would ascertain the point from *matter of fact*, we may notice the injunction given to Israel to extirpate the Amalekites, above three hundred years after they had committed the sin for which this judgment was to be inflicted on them[c]. And at the close of David's reign, a famine of three years was sent as a punishment of Saul's treachery in seeking to destroy the Gibeonites; nor was the punishment removed, till exemplary vengeance had been taken on the family of the departed monarch[d].

In *Scripture* there is, as we might well expect, abundant proof of this fundamental axiom. God *declares* it, as in many other places[e], so in the very verse from whence our text is taken[f]. In matters of more than ordinary importance, God often *appeals* to men respecting the truth of his own assertions: accordingly this is made a subject of appeal; "Is not the wickedness of men sealed up as in a bag, and deposited among my treasures," to be brought forth against them at the day of judgment[g]? Further, because he would have this truth impressed on the minds of all, he even *swears* in confirmation of it; "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works[h]."]

But plain and important as this truth is, men do not consider it—

[No man is so ignorant as not to be acquainted with this truth. There are many indeed who will put forth atheistical sentiments for the sake of vindicating their own conduct, and silencing

[a] Hos. vi. 7, 9, 10. [b] ver. 1. [c] 1 Sam. xv. 2.
[d] 2 Sam. xxi. 1—9. [e] Hos. viii. 13. & ix. 9.
[f] "They are before my face."
[g] Deut. xxxii. 34, 35. with Job xiv. 17. [h] Amos viii. 7.

silencing the accusations of conscience: they will say, like those of old, "Tush, God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it[1]:" but in their sober hours they will not hesitate to confess, that God both sees all their wickedness, and will remember it in order to a future retribution.

But the evil is, that, though men confess this truth, they "do not consider it:" they do not like to give it a place in their minds: they cannot bear to have it suggested to them. If the thought of it arise in their minds, they rush into business, or into company and dissipation, to get rid of it. That they do not consider it, is manifest: for could they sin with so much ease, if they did; or could they maintain such tranquillity of mind after having committed sin? Would not the thought of God's eye being upon them, cast some damp upon their pleasure; and the expectation of a future recompence occasion some disquietude? We are sure that many of those evils which are committed under the cover of the night, would not be committed, if only the presence of a superior should be seasonably interposed. How then must the presence of Almighty God awe us, if we would but duly consider it! Suppose a poisonous draught were put into our hands, and we were informed, that, within a few hours after we had drank it, we should be racked with inexpressible agony, and in the space of one day should die through the excess of torment; should we not reflect a moment before we ventured to drink it? And supposing us infatuated enough to sacrifice our lives for a momentary gratification, should we not put the cup to our lips with a trembling hand? and after we had swallowed the contents, should we not feel some concern, some regret, some sense of our folly? Could we go away and laugh at what we had done, and boast of it, and encourage our friends to do the same? If we could not, the reason is obvious. Much more therefore should we be affected with a dread of future sin, and a sorrow for the past, if we considered who is privy to our actions, and how certainly he will remember them to our everlasting confusion.]

To counteract this prevailing thoughtlessness, we will endeavour to expose,

II. The folly of it—

Such inconsideration can be productive of no good, and must be attended with incalculable mischief to the soul—

1. It will not induce forgetfulness in God—

[Amongst our fellow-creatures our conduct may have considerable effect: and others may be lulled asleep by means of our security. But God is occupied in his work, whether we be in ours or

[1] Ps. xciv. 7.

or not. He wakes, though we sleep: he sees, though we think ourselves hid from his sight: he marks, though we are regardless of him: nor does he ever feel more indignation, than when we feel ourselves most secure and composed. We may "think wickedly that he is even such an one as ourselves; but he will reprove us for what we have done amiss, and will set it in order before our eyes[k]." Nor is it the *act* only of murder or adultery that he will remember, but the *look*, the *desire*, the *thought*, yea "*all*" our wickedness, of whatever kind or whatever degree.]

2. It will rob us of all the benefits we might receive by reflection—

[If we did but consider that God has noted down all our wickedness, the next thought would be, How shall we get it blotted out of his book? This would lead us to see the inefficacy of our tears to wash away our guilt; and would stimulate us to inquire after that Saviour, whose "blood cleanses from all sin." Thus we might obtain the remission of our sins, and be restored to the favour of our offended God. But inconsideration robs us of all this. We shall never repent of our evil ways, till we have "considered" them. We shall never seek for mercy, till we have "considered" our guilt and danger. We shall never flee to Christ, till we have "considered" our need of him. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Can a thoughtless sinner take this view of the subject, and not confess his folly?]

3. It will lead us only to multiply our offences against God—

[The necessary consequence of inconsideration is, that we continue to live each succeeding day and year in the same manner as we did in time past; and, in many cases, harden ourselves more and more in wickedness. If we would at the close of every day call ourselves to an account how the day had been spent, and what God had recorded concerning us in the book of his remembrance, we should certainly abstain from many sins, which we now commit without thought or remorse. *Even if the sabbath alone were spent in this holy exercise, we should be kept from rushing into perdition as the horse into the battle.* But we are like a spendthrift, who, never considering how great his debts are, or how he shall discharge them, runs on from one extravagance to another, till he has accumulated a debt which involves him in disgrace and misery. Yea, we resemble a man on the eve of bankruptcy, who, knowing that his affairs are ruined, cannot endure to examine his accounts, but proceeds in the best way he can, till the fatal hour arrives, and his insolvency is declared. But, oh! what madness is it thus to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath!"]

4. It

[k] Ps. l. 21.

4. It will certainly issue in long and painful reflection—

[We may shake off reflection here; but the time is coming when we must and shall consider. God has said, "In the latter day ye shall consider it perfectly[l]." Yes, as soon as we come into the eternal world, we shall have a perfect view of all our past wickedness: we shall see it, not as we do now, through the medium of prejudice and self-love, but as God sees it, in all its enormity and with all its aggravations. The sins of thought as well as of act, the sins of omission as well as of commission, will all be open to our view; and there will be no possibility of diverting our attention from them. God bids us now consider; and we will not: but what shall we do in that day when he shall answer our cries with this severe rebuke, "SON, REMEMBER[m]?" 'Remember the sins committed; remember the warnings neglected; remember the mercies abused; remember the opportunities lost.' O sad remembrance! O dreary prospect of unalterable irremediable misery! Were it not then better to consider in time, when the most painful reflections will be salutary, than to protract the period of consideration till it shall be ten thousand times more painful, and altogether unavailing?]

ADVICE:

1. Call your past ways to remembrance—

[However long since any sins may have been committed, they are as fresh in God's memory, and as hateful in his sight, as if they had been committed this very hour. Endeavour then to get the same view of them as he has. Collect them all together: and what a dreadful mass will they appear! If you could suppose them all to have been crowded into the space of one day, and yesterday to have been the day in which they were all committed, what a monster would you appear in your own eyes! Yet, admitting the enormity of each sin to have been precisely such as it was at the moment of its commission, and such as it exists at present, such is the light in which you are viewed by God. Turn not away your eyes from this painful sight: you must behold it sooner or later: if you delay to look at it, the black catalogue of crimes will still increase, and the sight of them be yet more terrible. In the name of God then, I intreat you all, "CONSIDER YOUR WAYS[n]."]

2. Seek to have your sins blotted out from the book of God's remembrance—

[It has already been observed, that this may be done. Though you neither have, nor can have, any thing to merit such a favour, God is willing to bestow it for his own name's sake: his word

[l] Jer. xxiii. 20. [m] Luke xvi. 25. [n] Hag. i. 5, 7.

word to you is, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins[o]." He even promises to "cast them into the very depths of the sea[p]," from whence they shall never be brought against you: yea, he "covenants" to efface them, as it were from his own memory; and says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will *remember* their sin *no more*[q]." And will you not seek this mercy? Is it too soon yet awhile for you to enjoy it? Will you not be happier in the possession of it, than in the continuance of your sins? Think how such a proposal would be received by those who are now reflecting upon their ways in hell: would they need to be urged a second time to ask for mercy? O seek it instantly; seek it with all importunity; seek it in the adorable name of Jesus; seek it after the example of the saints of old[r]: and then, "though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be white as wool."]

3. Endeavour to walk as in the presence of God—

[A sense of the Divine presence will be an excellent preservative from sin. We know how careful we are of our conduct in the presence of any one whose good opinion we value: let us "set the Lord always before us[s]," in order that our circumspection may be increased, and that we may be kept as much from secret as from open sin, from sin in the heart as well as sin in the life. Let us "commune much with our own hearts in our chamber, and be still[t]." Let us strive to keep a conscience void of offence, and to approve ourselves in all things to "Him, who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins." Let it be our ambition, that on every day more and more acts of piety may be recorded in the book of God's remembrance; that so he may "remember us for good[u]" while we are here on earth, and welcome us as "good and faithful servants" when we enter into the eternal world.]

[o] Isai. xliii. 25.
[p] Mic. vii. 19.
[q] Jer. xxxi. 34.
[r] Ps. xxv. 7. & lxxix. 8.
[s] Ps. xvi. 8, 9. & li. 1, 2, 7.
[t] Ps. iv. 4.
[u] See Neh. xiii. 14, 22, 31. & Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

DCVII.

CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY.

Hos. vii. 8, 9. *Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people: Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not.*

IF the body be oppressed with sickness, we inquire into the symptoms of the disorder, and trace it,

if

if possible, to its proper cause. The same course is proper in reference to the soul, and indeed to the state of nations as well as of individuals. The prophet is representing the declining, and almost desolate, condition of the ten tribes: and, in the words before us, he marks the particular sins which had provoked God to forsake them; and the fearful consequences of their transgressions. The Israelites had, in direct opposition to God's command, united themselves with the Heathen, and incorporated many of their idolatrous rites with the worship of the true God. They were even "mad upon their idols," while they were very cold and indifferent in what related to Jehovah. In consequence of this, God gave them up into the hands of their enemies. Pul, king of Assyria, exhausted their treasures by the tribute he imposed[a]: and the king of Syria reduced their armies to a mere shadow, "making them even as the dust by threshing[b]." Proofs and evidences of decay were visible in every department of the State, and such as indicated approaching dissolution: yet such was the infatuation of the people, that they were as unconcerned and secure as if they had been in the most safe and flourishing condition.

It is not however our intention to enter any further into the history of the ten tribes. We shall rather draw your attention to our own personal concerns, of which theirs was a type and shadow: and we shall proceed to point out the causes and symptoms of spiritual decay.

I. The causes—

The two things mentioned in the text will be found among the most fruitful sources of declension in the divine life:

1. An undue connexion with the world—

[A certain degree of intercourse with mankind is necessary, in order to a due discharge of our civil and social duties. But if we mix with the world by choice, we shall go contrary to the commands of God, and suffer loss in our souls. We are enjoined to "come out from among them, and be separate[c]." God even appeals to us respecting the impossibility of maintaining with propriety

[a] 2 Kin. xv. 19. [b] 2 Kin. xiii. 7. [c] Rom. xii. 2. Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

propriety any intimate communion with them[d]: and our Lord characterizes his followers as being no more of the world than he himself was[e]. But some professors of religion connect themselves more closely, and involve themselves more deeply, with the world *in business*, than they need to do: others associate with them *as companions:* and others are so blinded by their passions, as to unite themselves with them *in marriage.* What must we expect to be the result of such conduct? Must it not expose us to many temptations? Are we not, when so circumstanced, likely to drink into the spirit of the world, and to be drawn into a conformity to their ways? Surely the falls and apostacies of many must be traced to this source: and it will be well if this evil do not become fatal to some of *us*.]

2. A partial regard to God—

[A "cake" baked upon the coals and "not turned," would be burned up on one side, while it was altogether doughy on the other. This fitly represents the state of those who are cold and indifferent in things relating to religion, but excessively ardent in their pursuit of other objects. Yet what is more common than such a state? Some professors are so intent on their *worldly business*, and have their hearts so engaged in it, as scarcely to have any zeal left for better things. Some are occupied with this or that *favourite study*, in comparison of which the Bible, and prayer, and communion with God, have no charms for them. Some are inflamed by *politics*, and are never happy but when they are declaiming upon the affairs of State. Some are so intent upon *the circumstantials of religion*, such as Baptism or Church-government, that they seem to think an agreement with them in their opinions on those subjects as essential to salvation as even piety itself. Some again are heated by *controversy about certain doctrines*, while, alas! they pay but little attention to their duties, especially the duties of humility and love. What wonder if the soul languish, when its eternal interests are thus postponed to matters of inferior importance? If we would adorn our holy profession, we must be *penetrated throughout* with a fervent regard to God; and all other things must be subordinated to the one thing needful.]

Having traced the causes of spiritual decay, let us notice,

II. The symptoms—

Agreeably to what has been observed in relation to the Israelites, we shall mention three marks, which, in the progressive stages of decay, will shew themselves in a declining soul:

1. Inward

[d] 2 Cor. vi. 14—17. [e] John xvii. 14.

1. Inward weakness—

[The exercises of religion require our utmost efforts: without a fixedness of purpose, an intenseness of thought, an ardour of desire, and a resoluteness of conduct, we cannot get forward in our Christian course. But when we have declined from God, all these are proportionably relaxed. The bow is unstrung, and cannot send the arrow to the mark[f]. We take up the Bible; but it is a sealed book: we address ourselves to prayer; but our mouths are shut, and we cannot utter a word before God. The duties which were once easy, are become arduous and irksome. The temptations which once had lost all their force, now obstruct our way, and entangle our feet. The cross, which was once an object of holy glorying, and served only to animate us to fresh exertions, now becomes an object of terror; and instead of taking it up with cheerfulness, we study as much as possible to avoid it.

Let us look and see, whether "strangers have not devoured our strength," and whether "the things which remain in us be not ready to die[g]."]

2. Outward proofs of that weakness—

["Grey hairs" are indications of declining strength. They are first thinly interspersed; and afterwards diffused over the whole head. Thus are the symptoms of decline small at first, and scarcely visible, except upon close inspection. They will however appear, when the inward weakness has commenced. There will be a visible alteration *in the temper:* a proud imperious spirit will be more ready to shew itself: fretfulness and impatience will more easily arise. A change will be found *in our dealings with the world.* We shall be less open, less generous, less scrupulous about adhering to truth, or practising the tricks of trade. *In our families* also will a deterioration of our state be manifest. There will be less attention paid to their spiritual interests. The word of God will not be read to them with such practical and interesting remarks: nor will the devotions be conducted with life; but will degenerate into a mere form. *In the closet*, more especially, the symptoms of our decay will be seen. Prayer will probably be a mere lip-service, and not unfrequently be entirely omitted. The sacred volume will either be glanced over in haste, or lie wholly neglected. In short, there will be no delight in God, no peaceful serenity of mind, no joyful hope of immortality. These things will be exchanged for gloom and melancholy, for sighs and sorrows, for an accusing conscience, and a dread of death.]

3. Insensibility under that weakness—

[Things have proceeded far when this mark appears. But it is the natural effect of sin to blind the eyes, and harden the heart, and

[f] Hos. vii. 16. [g] Rev. iii. 2.

and sear the conscience[h]. *Twice* is it said of the Israelites in the text, "They knew it not:" they had contracted a stupid indifference, bordering on judicial blindness and infatuation. And this is the state to which many professors of religion are reduced. Others see their grey hairs, but they see them not: they have ceased to look into the glass of God's law, or to examine themselves: they have quieted their minds by some carnal expedient of business, or company, or by comparing themselves with others. Deplorable indeed is their condition! and if they be not soon roused from their lethargy, they will have reason to wish they had never been born, or never seen the light of Gospel truth[i].]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are resting in a formal religion—

[Religion is a state of holy active exertion[k] in the things pertaining to God. God says to us, "My son, give me thy heart[k]." Without this, our services are of no value. Look to it then, my Brethren, that ye get your hearts quickened by the Spirit of God. You must not be satisfied with seeking: "you must strive to enter in at the strait gate[l]." You must "take the kingdom of heaven by violence[m]." Beg then that you may be "renewed by the Spirit in your inward man," and be enabled, so to fight as to conquer, so to run as to win the prize[n].]

2. Those who profess to experience "the power of godliness"—

[Astonishing is the deceitfulness of the human heart. We all see in others defects, of which they themselves are not conscious. And can we suppose that we ourselves also are not blind to our own defects? Yes; and perhaps the very locks which we think our greatest ornaments, are full of grey hairs. Our graces perhaps are rather the resemblance, than the reality, of virtue: our humility may be affectation, our zeal pride, our confidence presumption. Let us "be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy[o]." Let us search and try ourselves[p]; and beg of God also to search and try us[q]. Let us be careful that we set out well, and then labour to "go on from strength to strength, till we appear before God in Zion[r]."]

[h] 1 John ii. 11. Heb. iii. 13. 1 Tim. iv. 2.
[i] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. [k] Prov. xxiii. 26. [l] Luke xiii. 24.
[m] Matt. xi. 12. [n] 1 Cor. ix. 24, 26. [o] 2 Cor. xi. 2.
[p] Lam. iii. 40. [q] Ps. cxxxix. 23. [r] Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

DCVIII.

GUILT AND DANGER OF AN UNCONVERTED STATE.

Hos. vii. 13. *Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me.*

SUCH is the infatuation of unregenerate men, that they always promise themselves security in the ways of sin: but it is certain that they are never more in danger than when they fancy themselves most secure: they may be well compared to a bird that is allured to a net: it hears the notes that call and invite it to the society of some kindred bird: fearless of danger, it obeys the summons: it hastens to the place from whence the sound issues, little thinking that, instead of a companion, it shall find a foe. The fowler, however, who has spread the net, sees that the unsuspecting bird is quickly to resign its liberty, and perhaps its life. Thus it is with those who listen to the enchanting voice of sin: they follow it, but know not that it is for their life: (Prov. vii. 23.) The word of Jehovah is gone forth, nor can it ever be reversed: it says, "Woe unto the wicked, it shall go ill with him;" and, "when he saith, Peace and safety, then shall sudden destruction come upon him as travail upon a woman with child, and he shall not escape." To this purpose God speaks to the Israelites in the passage before us: he says, "Ephraim is like a silly dove, without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria: but when they go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven." Having thus represented their danger in figurative expressions, he declares it plainly, in the most awful terms: "Woe unto them, for they have fled from me! destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against me! though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me." From these words, we will endeavour to set before you,

I. The

I. The state of men in general;

II. The peculiar sinfulness of their state;

III. The danger of it.

I. The state of men in general—

To those who can see nothing but the outward conduct, there may appear to be a very considerable difference between the states of different men: the moral and decent may be esteemed exceeding righteous and good, while the openly vicious and profane are execrated as exceeding vile. And it must be acknowledged, that, as far as the conduct of these different persons respects society, there is a considerable difference between them; but God, who looks at the heart, and estimates every thing by the respect it has to him, sees that all men are very nearly, if not altogether, upon a level; all men appear to him as "sepulchres, full of all uncleanness:" some indeed appear whited and outwardly adorned, while others are open, and discover all their deformity. Still however, inwardly they are all the same. In the first place, all "*flee from him.*"

Adam had no sooner sinned, than he lost his delight in God, and fled from the presence of his Maker. From that time, all his descendants have felt the same aversion to intercourse with the Deity: they love not the ordinances where God reveals himself to men: when God calls them, "they all begin with one consent to make excuse:" some plead their social engagements; others the pressure of worldly business; all have some plea to make; all say, in effect, I *can* not, or, I *will* not, come. In dangers or in troubles, they will rather go to the creature than to God: even under a sense of sin, they will rather flee to their own resolutions, and trust in their own endeavours, than they will rely upon the strength and righteousness of the Lord Jesus. When God calls, they turn a deaf ear to his invitations. When he follows them, as it were, by the convictions of his Spirit, they actually "*flee from him:*" they shake off the thoughts that trouble them; they endeavour to drown

drown reflection in business or pleasure; and the whole language of their hearts and actions is, like theirs in Job, (xxi. 14.) "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

But the aversion to God which carnal men feel, is carried much further: they not only flee from him, as finding no pleasure, no satisfaction in his presence, but they also "*transgress against him.*" The law is yet in a measure written on their hearts, but they will not comply with its dictates: they see clearly, in many things, that such or such a course of action must be displeasing to God, and "that they who do such things are worthy of death; yet they both do these things themselves, and have pleasure in those that do them;" choosing them for their companions, and countenancing them in their actions: nor is this occasionally only, and through temptation or inadvertence: no; it is the settled course and tenor of their lives. The commands or prohibitions of God have no weight with them: whatever is reputable in the world, or agreeable to themselves, *that* they do; whenever their sensual inclinations or worldly interests strongly bias them to any line of conduct, it soon appears that they have cast off the yoke of God, and that they feel no restraint whatever, except that which arises from temporal considerations.

Nor is this all: they "*speak lies against God:*" they declare, in the face of the whole world, that the service of sin and Satan is to be preferred before the service of God. In every transgression they commit, they *virtually* speak to this effect; "This is happiness:" as for obedience to God, that would be an insupportable restraint: true happiness consists in renouncing all allegiance to God, and in following our own will." Moreover they say, like those of old, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil;" *i. e.* if we serve him, we shall have no profit; nor shall we sustain any loss if we serve him not." We must remember, that God interprets our actions; and considers man as speaking those things which their conduct shews to be the secret language of their hearts: and indeed this

is

is strictly just; for all must allow, that actions speak more forcibly, and more truly, than words. But will not the Lord do good or evil? Will he not reward those that diligently seek him? Will he clear the guilty, and suffer them to pass unpunished? No, assuredly; "he will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked; between those who serve him, and those who serve him not." Yet such are the lies which ungodly men are speaking against him.

Let any one say, Whether this be not really the state of carnal unregenerate men? Do they not thus flee from God's presence, transgress against his laws, and, in their conduct at least, misrepresent him to the world? Let us look round the world, and see whether this be not a true picture of mankind? Let us look into our own bosoms, and see whether it do not exactly represent ourselves? It may be, that we have not been so openly immoral as others: but yet, if we will examine our own hearts, we shall see that we have been as far from any real delight in secret communion with God as the most profligate man on earth. We have been as far from sacrificing all our own interests and inclinations to the will and law of God as the most flagrant rebel in the world: nor have we, in our actions, been living witnesses for the truth of God, any more than those who have denied every word of the Bible. This then is clearly the state of all unregenerate men. We come now,

II. To shew you the peculiar sinfulness of their state—

If, without attending to any collateral circumstances, we were simply to point out the evil which is contained in the foregoing conduct, methinks the state of such men would appear beyond measure sinful; but the sinfulness of it is greatly aggravated by the consideration in my text; "Though I have *redeemed* them, yet have they spoken lies against me."

If we call to mind the mercies which had been vouchsafed to the Israelites, we shall perceive that the malignity of their sins was exceedingly enhanced by the obligations which had been conferred upon them: they had been delivered from their bondage in

in Egypt, and brought to a land flowing with milk and honey. Such an interposition as this never had been known from the beginning of the world: that God should go and take an oppressed nation out of the midst of another nation; that he should reign over them as their king; that he should destroy seven nations greater and mightier than they, and establish them in the possession of their land; that he should, in ten thousand instances, step forth as their protector and deliverer, when they were reduced to the lowest state of wretchedness and misery; that he should vouchsafe them, not one redemption only, but many; this, I say, required the most ample returns of gratitude and obedience: the ingratitude therefore which they manifested, stamped a tenfold malignity on every sin they committed. But we have an infinitely better redemption vouchsafed to us: a Redemption of which theirs was but a type and shadow. We have been redeemed from *a far sorer bondage*, even from bondage to sin and Satan; from all the curses of the broken law; from all the miseries of death and hell. We have also been *brought into a better land;* not to the possession of mere temporal comforts, but to spiritual and eternal happiness; to the society of glorified saints and angels; to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and never-fading; in short, to all the glory of heaven. This has been accomplished also for us by *far more wonderful and endearing means:* God has sent his own Son into our guilty world; sent him to become a man, and to stand in our stead; sent him to give his own life a ransom for us; sent him to pay down the price of our redemption; and has appointed him to bring forth every one of his redeemed; to support and guide them through this dreary wilderness, and to conduct them, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, to the full possession of their inheritance. Oh, what a Redemption is this! What obligations does this lay upon us to be faithful and obedient! and what a fearful aggravation must this be of all our disobedience! Yet, behold, we are the persons whose transgressions are so multiplied;

tiplied: we are they whom Christ came from heaven to seek and save: and yet we flee from his presence: we are they, for whose sakes "he gave himself, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" and yet we are continually transgressing against him: we are they towards whom he has shewn such astonishing love and mercy; and yet we are saying, that he regards us not, and that it will be in vain to serve him. Ah, Brethren, is there no guilt in such a state? and shall not God be avenged of such a people as this? Do not look at your sins merely as they affect society; *that* is no just criterion; *that* is no proper test. Estimating your conduct merely in *that* view, you will be ready to applaud yourselves as righteous, if you should happen to have escaped the grosser pollutions of the world: but view your sins as contrasted with the love of Christ; see him dying to bring you nigh to God, and yet yourself fleeing from God; see him shedding his blood to cleanse you from sin, and yet yourself continuing to transgress; see him faithfully executing every thing he had undertaken for you, and yet yourself lying against him. *This* is the light wherein to view your conduct: draw nigh then, and see it; ponder it in your hearts; consider it well. What offence can a servant commit against his master, or a child against his parent, or a man against his benefactor, that can bear any proportion to the smallest offence that you have committed against Christ? and yet you have offended times without number, and that too without any remorse; as though men were bound to requite your kindnesses, but you were at liberty to trample upon the most sacred obligations that God is able to confer upon you. Ah, Beloved! know every one of you, that "God seeth not as man seeth;" he considers things not according to man's estimation, but as they really are: and when he shall call you to an account, you will see every sin aggravated by redeeming love: you will see that, in fact, you "crucify Christ afresh, you trample under foot his blood, you put him to an

open

open shame." And "shall not God visit for these things?" Yes, assuredly. I will proceed therefore,

III. To set before you the danger of such a state—

You can bear me witness, my Brethren, that I delight not in setting forth the terrors of the Lord. I find it far more pleasant to be publishing the glad tidings, and to be expatiating on the fulness and freeness of the Gospel salvation: but I must not conceal from you what God speaks concerning you. Were I to be unfaithful to you in this respect, I should but betray your souls to ruin; and "your blood would be required at my hands." Attend therefore to the solemn denunciations of God's wrath against you: hear, I say, and tremble: hear, and lift up your hearts to God for mercy and deliverance: "Woe unto them, for they have fled from me! Destruction unto them, because they have transgressed against me!"—Woe and destruction comprehend both present and eternal misery. There is much woe, even in this life, as the consequence of sin. Who can tell the alarms which haunt the wicked in their secret retirements? Who can tell the apprehensions they feel at the approach of death? I know that they may sear their consciences, so far as to become past feeling; and they may delude themselves with ungrounded hopes, so far as even to attain a confidence of their safety: but notwithstanding this, it is certain that "there is no peace to the wicked:" wherever they go, and whatever they do, they have no solid peace: they are either harassed with tumultuous passions, or terrified with misgiving fears. God has said repeatedly, that "there is no peace to the wicked." But let us suppose that they pass through life with tolerable serenity; What will they do at the instant of their departure from the body? Then they will begin to understand the meaning of the word "destruction:" *now* perhaps they listen to it with indifference; but *then* they cannot remain insensible to it. What terror must seize them when they behold the face of incensed Majesty! when they see that God, whose laws they have trampled on, and that Saviour whose redemp-

redemption they have slighted! What agony must pierce their souls, when they hear him say, "Depart, accursed, into everlasting fire!" And, when they are hurled headlong into the bottomless abyss, when they are lying down in flames of fire, and know that they must "dwell with everlasting burnings," how will they gnash their teeth with anguish! how will they curse the day that they were born! how will they curse themselves for their own folly in neglecting redeeming love! But can it be, that they who live in the state before described, are exposed to all this misery? Yes, "Woe unto them! destruction unto them!" saith Jehovah. And the Apostle says, "that they who know not God and obey not his Gospel," or, in other words, they who flee from God and trample on redeeming love, "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." The whole Sacred Volume attests and confirms this awful truth: every part of it speaks to the same effect as David, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God."

Now, my Brethren, deceive not your own souls. To what purpose will it be, to be speaking peace to yourselves, when God is denouncing "woe and destruction" unto you? If you say that you are not the worst of sinners, what is that to the purpose? If you say that you are honest and just and sober, what is all that to the purpose? This, and more than this, the Pharisee could say for himself; yet was he not hereby justified. The only question is, Do you answer to the character drawn in my text? Have you not fled from God? have you not transgressed against him? have you not spoken lies against him? If you are disposed to deny any of these charges, consider with yourselves, Have you sought your happiness in communion with God? and, "when he has said, Seek ye my face, has your heart always answered, Thy face, Lord, will I seek?" Are you not also transgressors against his law? Have you not been just now acknowledging upon your knees, that "you have done those

things which you ought not to have done, and left undone those things which you ought to have done?" And can you affirm, that the constant course and tenor of your life has proclaimed to all around you, that "to fear God and keep his commandments was the whole end and happiness of man?" No; "every mouth must be shut; and not you only, but the whole world, must become guilty before God." Know then that you, and that every man, while in an unregenerate state, is exposed to the wrath of God; and that that wrath will come upon you to the uttermost, if you "flee not for refuge to the Hope set before you."

We will now CONCLUDE, with two inferences from the whole:

1. What suitable provision is made for us in the Gospel!

You have seen the awful state of unregenerate men, and will be ready to doubt whether there can be any help or hope for persons so circumstanced. But thanks be to our God and Father, that he has not left us to perish in our sins! on the contrary, he has pitied us, and sent us his only dear Son to deliver us from our lost estate. Numberless as our iniquities have been, they were all laid upon the head of Jesus, our great Sacrifice: all were expiated by his blood; so that God can be just, and yet the justifier of those who repent and believe the Gospel. O Brethren, be thankful for this provision: be thankful that you are not only permitted, but commanded, to come to Christ for a free and full remission of all your sins. Have you fled from your God and Father? Behold! Jesus, his beloved Son, is come to seek and save you. Have you transgressed against him times without number? The blood of Jesus is shed to cleanse you from all sin. Have you in the whole course of your life spoken nothing but lies against your adorable Redeemer? That very Redeemer will make you to experience his inviolable truth, in receiving you to mercy, and in rejecting none that come unto him.

Surely,

Surely, if bread be suited to the hungry, or water to the thirsty, then is the provision set before us in the Gospel exactly suited to the wants and necessities of all who feel their need of mercy.

2. How happy are they who have cordially embraced the Gospel!

In two respects have they experienced a most blessed change; namely, in their character and condition. You have heard that the natural and unconverted man flees from God, transgresses against him, and speaks lies against him. Not so the man that is converted: he flees to God; he seeks the Divine presence; he desires the favour of God more than life, and esteems "his loving-kindness better than life itself." If any ask him, "Who will shew us any good?" his answer is, like David's, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." He now also desires to serve and obey God: it is his grief and burthen that he cannot get rid of sin; he longs for holiness; he desires to be changed into the Divine image; he wishes to be in heaven, not merely because he shall there be free from trouble, but because he shall be free from sin. And now, too, he is a living witness for the truth of God: he "sets to his seal that God is true:" he is not afraid to testify before the whole world, that God's service is perfect freedom, and that "*in* keeping his commandments there is great reward:" his whole life proclaims to those around him, that God is a mighty God, and greatly to be feared; yet that he is also a loving, merciful, and faithful God, and therefore worthy to be loved and trusted with the whole heart. You have heard also that woe and destruction are denounced against the unconverted; but there is no woe, no destruction, to the converted soul: no; "his sins are put away from him, as far as the east is from the west:" while the iniquities of the ungodly are (as we are told) "sealed up in a bag," to be brought forth against them in the day of judgment, the iniquities that have been committed by a converted soul, are, from the first moment of his conversion, "cast into

the depths of the sea;" not into the shallows, from whence they might be recovered, but into the depths, never more to be brought to remembrance. Whoever then ye be, who have embraced the Gospel, rejoice, and leap for joy, on account of the blessed change that you have experienced. If your consciences testify, that you are really seeking after God, that you desire to be delivered from all sin, and that you are endeavouring to be witnesses for God in the world, rejoice; "for it becometh well your souls to be thankful." You have been redeemed; rejoice therefore in the redemption vouchsafed unto you: "you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's."

DCIX.

MISERY OF A DESERTED PEOPLE.

Hosea ix. 12. *Woe unto them, when I depart from them!*

THERE is nothing so essential to our happiness as the Divine presence. With that, we may smile at all earthly trials: without it, not all the universe can satisfy the soul. This is promised to us as the greatest good that can be vouchsafed to us in this world: and the withdrawment of it is threatened as the greatest of all evils[a].

In the words before us, God, having denounced this judgment against his rebellious people, gives an awful intimation of the greatness of the calamity; "Woe unto them, when I depart from them!"

We propose to shew,

I. How great a calamity is the withdrawment of God's presence—

As God is pleased to distinguish both individuals and collective bodies with his favour, so under great provocations he departs from them: and this is a very dreadful calamity, by whomsoever it may be experienced: it is so,

1. To

[a] Jer. xxiii. 33.

1. To nations—

[These, as we see in the Jewish history, prosper beyond the common course of events, when God takes them under his special protection. On the other hand, they are destroyed with equal rapidity when he sets his face against them. War, famine, and pestilence are his ministers: the stars in their courses fight against his enemies: the elements enlist themselves under his banners. Universal nature rises up to avenge the quarrel of his covenant. Wretched indeed is that nation which he has abandoned to ruin! The destruction of the Jewish nation is an awful specimen and pledge of the vengeance which he will execute on those who have filled up the measure of their iniquities.]

2. To Churches—

[The Christian Church, when in its infancy, was honoured with very peculiar tokens of the Divine presence, and, in consequence thereof, "grew and multiplied" to a surprising extent. But when the life and power of godliness had declined among the Churches of Asia, and he had often warned them to no purpose, he "took away the candlestick from them;" so that in the cities where Christ was once worshipped and glorified, his name is scarcely known. Nor need we go back to the early ages of the Church; for in many places in our own land where Christ was once preached, nothing is now heard but Socinian heresy or heathen morality. The ignorance of the preachers, the blindness of the hearers, and the unprofitableness of the ordinances, concur in establishing the melancholy truth affirmed in our text[aa].]

3. To individuals—

[If we admit, as we must, that "God will not forsake his people[b]," still we have no evidence that we are his, any longer than we obey his commandments. If we go out from his people, it is rather a proof that we never truly belonged to them[c]. But lamentable is the state of him who provokes God to leave him: for as soon as ever God deserts him, an evil spirit will enter into him[d]; yea, perhaps seven spirits, worse than ever before inhabited his soul, may take possession of him, and reduce him to a more awful state of bondage than he ever before experienced[e]. Hardness of heart, searedness of conscience, and probably an abandonment of all religious profession, with painful apprehensions of death and judgment, will be the bitter fruits of such a dereliction, which at last will issue in an aggravated and eternal condemnation.]

Let us then attentively consider,

II. How we may avert it from ourselves—

We

[aa] Compare Mic. iii. 6, 7. Isai. vi. 9, 10. Am. viii. 11—13.
[b] 1 Sam. xii. 22. [c] 1 John ii. 19. [d] 1 Sam. xvi. 14.
[e] Luke xi. 24—26.

We cannot pretend to specify all the means which are to be used; but we will notice some of the most important:

1. Let us abstain from that which will drive God from us—

[Sin is "that abominable thing which his soul hates;" and, if we wilfully indulge it, he will shew his abhorrence of it, by hiding his face from us, and withdrawing from us his blessing. He has said, that his "Spirit shall not alway strive with man." And it is certain, that we may "grieve his Spirit," till we altogether "quench" his sacred motions. Let us then turn, not only from open, but from secret sin. Let us "purge out that leaven, that we may be a new lump." For though God will "not be extreme to mark the unallowed infirmities" of our nature, he will shew his indignation against hypocrisy, however refined it may be in its nature, or specious in its appearance[f].]

2. Let us notice the very first intimations of his displeasure—

[God does not utterly forsake the soul at once: he testifies his displeasure in a variety of ways, before he finally forsakes us. As, in withdrawing from his Temple of old, he descended from the mercy-seat to the threshold; and then went from the threshhold to the court; then from the court to the door of the east gate; and, lastly, from the gate to the mountain[g]: so, in his departures from Churches or individuals, he gives notice of his intention, that we may repent us of our evil ways. He ceases to manifest himself to us; he gives us up to the dominion of our former lusts; he embitters our state by forebodings of our future doom; and, when he cannot prevail, he "gives us over to a reprobate mind[h]," and leaves us to fill up the measure of our iniquities. Let us "turn then at his first reproof," that, instead of "taking his Holy Spirit from us," he may "pour it out upon us" in richer abundance[i].]

3. Let us guard against secret departures from him—

[It is rarely, if ever, that God leaves us, unless we first leave him. He has laid down this as the rule of his conduct; "I am with you, while ye be with me: if ye be with me, I will be with you; but if ye forsake me, I will forsake you[k]." If we trace all our darkness and distresses to their proper source, we shall find that they originate in our own unfaithfulness. Let us then watch against a neglect of secret duties, or deadness in them. Let us "give ourselves to the word of God and prayer." Let us "stir

[f] Job xx. 4—7. [g] Ezek. ix. 3. & x. 18. & ib. 19. & xi. 23.
[h] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. [i] Prov. i. 23. [k] 2 Chron. xv. 2.

"stir up ourselves, to lay hold on God[l];" and, with a holy boldness, say, like Jacob, "I will not let thee go[m]." In this way we may detain him, and secure his continued presence: or if, "in a little wrath, he hide his face from us for a moment, with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon us[n]."]

[l] Isai. lxiv. 7. [m] Gen. xxxii. 26. [n] Isai. liv. 8.

DCX.

JACOB WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL.

Hos. xii. 3, 4, 6. *By his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto him . . . . Therefore turn thou unto thy God: keep mercy and judgment; and wait on thy God continually.*

THE historical parts of Scripture, if duly improved, will be found no less useful than any other. The Apostles often refer to them, and declare, that the things which had occurred to their ancestors, had "happened to them for ensamples," and that they were recorded "for our admonition." The prophet Hosea was reproving both Ephraim (or the ten tribes) and Judah (the two remaining tribes) for their respective sins. But having called the latter by the name of "Jacob," he thought it proper to guard them against the delusion of imagining themselves accepted of God because of their descent from Jacob, when their conduct was in direct opposition to that which he maintained. He then brings to their remembrance a very striking instance of Jacob's communion with God; and takes occasion from it to urge them to an imitation of his example.

We shall consider,

I. Jacob's victory—

In a season of great distress he betook himself to prayer—

[Jacob was greatly alarmed at the tidings that his brother Esau was coming against him with four hundred men to destroy him. He therefore used all the most prudential means to pacify his brother, or at least to prevent the total destruction of himself and his family. But he did not trust in the means he had devised.

He

He determined to seek protection from God, well knowing that no means whatever could succeed without him, and that his favour would be a sure defence.

When Jacob staid behind in order to call upon his God, God instantly came forth to meet him. The person who is said to have wrestled with him is sometimes called a man, sometimes an angel, and sometimes God[a]. It was none other than the Son of God, "the Angel of the Covenant," who assumed on this occasion, as he did on many other occasions, an human shape: and by his condescending to come to Jacob in this manner, he shewed, both to him and us, that none should ever seek his face in vain.

As for Jacob's wrestling with the angel, the prophet explains the import of that phrase, by saying, that Jacob "wept and made supplication unto him." He "stirred up himself, as it were, to lay hold on God;" and pleaded his cause before him with boldness and confidence. Assured of a successful issue, he persevered in the conflict till break of day; and when solicited by his apparent adversary to terminate his exertions, he replied, "I will not let thee go until thou bless me." Yet we are particularly informed, that with this boldness there was a mixture of the deepest humility; for he urged his petitions, as our Lord himself did in his incarnate state[b], with strong crying and tears.

Thus did Jacob shew us to whom we should go in an hour of trouble, and in what manner we should endeavour to interest him in our behalf.]

By this means he obtained the desired relief—

[We are told twice in the text, that "he had power, and prevailed." He prevailed with God; and by God's assistance prevailed over man. The great object of his suit was to defeat the malice, and assuage the wrath, of his brother Esau. But how should he effect this? Conciliating as his measures and his conduct were, he could not insure success; and therefore he went to God, who has all hearts in his hand, and turneth them whithersoever he will. He well knew, that, if once he could get God on his side, he was safe; for that "none could be against him, if God were for him." To God therefore he presented his supplication; and behold the instantaneous effect! the enraged persecutor meets him with fraternal affection, and the only strife between them was, who should manifest the greatest love.]

In the exhortation grounded on this fact, we see,

II. The improvement we should make of it—

The intermediate words, omitted in the text, are merely a repetition of the same idea, that the person who had met with Jacob in Bethel, was "the Lord God

[a] Compare Gen. xxxii. 24, 28, 30. with ver. 4, 5. [b] Heb. v. 7.

God of Hosts;" and that, in thus conversing with Jacob, he had, in fact, conversed with the Jewish nation, and had evinced his readiness to hear the supplications of all that call upon him. Then follows the prophet's exhortation, which it will be proper to enforce;

1. "Turn thou unto thy God"—

[He that was Jacob's God will also be ours: he is ours by external profession, and will be ours by the special communication of his grace, if we seek him with our whole heart.

To those who are in trouble, God is the only refuge[a]. We may go to the creature, and obtain no benefit: but, if we make our application to him, he will hear and help us. In him we shall be as in an impregnable fortress; and if the whole human race were combined for our destruction, not an hair of our head should perish. Let every one of us then turn unto God; and we shall find him a very present help in trouble.]

2. "Keep mercy and judgment"—

[We may be ready to think, that as Jacob, notwithstanding his perfidious conduct, found acceptance with God, we may also live in the violation of our duty, and transgress the plainest principles of love and equity, and yet have God for our protector and friend. But Jacob's treachery was a source of innumerable troubles to him through life, and especially of those very fears that harassed him on this occasion. And we shall find, that, sooner or later, deceit will bring its own punishment along with it. Doubtless when Jacob "wept," he did so from a recollection that he had brought all these evils on himself, and had altogether forfeited the Divine favour. And to those in hell, it will be no inconsiderable augmentation of their misery to reflect, that they brought it on themselves.

Let us then determine, through grace, that we will give no just occasion to the enemies of our religion to blaspheme, but that we will in every thing keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man.]

3. "Wait on thy God continually"—

[Whether we be reduced to such manifest straits as Jacob was, or not, we equally need the superintending care of God's Providence. We have spiritual enemies, incomparably more numerous, powerful, and inveterate than Esau's band; nor can any human means effectually defeat their malice.

Let us then not merely call on God occasionally, under the pressure of some heavy trial, or in the near prospect of death; but let us maintain fellowship with him continually, and by fervent supplication

[a] Nahum i. 7.

supplication prevail with him to preserve us from all evil, and to bless us with all spiritual blessings. Let us remember, that he is *our* God in Christ Jesus, and that through the aid of our incarnate God we shall be more than conquerors over every enemy*.]

* If this were the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, it might be improved, 1. in reference to *the subject*; 2. in reference to *the occasion*. The former of these heads might be treated as above; and under the latter it might be shewn from a variety of instances (*e. g.* 2 Sam. xv. 31. & xvii. 14. 2 Chron. xx. 5, 23. Isai. xxxvii. 15, 36.) that humble and importunate prayer is the most effectual method of defeating the rage or devices of our enemies.

DCXI.

JEHOVAH ALONE DESERVING OF OUR FEAR OR CONFIDENCE.

Hos. xiii. 4. *Thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no Saviour beside me.*

IN the holy Scriptures, every kind of argument is urged that is proper to influence the minds of men: sometimes we are persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, and sometimes are allured by his exceeding great and precious promises. A difference is observed towards men differently disposed, and differently circumstanced: "towards some, compassion is exercised" in all its gentlest forms; whilst others are "saved with fear, and snatched out of the fire" with a kind of compulsive violence. But it not unfrequently happens, that where the obstinacy of men is such as almost to preclude a hope of prevailing with them, both the kinds of argument are combined, in order, if possible, by either, or by both, to overcome the obdurate soul. Thus, in the passage before us, the prophet, having represented the ten tribes as increasingly shameless in their idolatries, declares from God, that they shall pass away like the morning cloud, or early dew; and that, like chaff from a threshing-floor, or smoke from a chimney, they shall be scattered as with a whirlwind over the face of the whole earth*. But still, as though God repented

* ver. 2, 3.

repented of denouncing so heavy a judgment against them, he addresses them with tender pity; "Yet I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt; and thou shalt know no god before me; for there is no Saviour beside me:" that is, "I can never forget the relation which I bear towards thee; and I am as willing as ever to bestow on thee all the blessings of salvation, if only thou wilt banish from thee those rivals which have provoked me to jealousy."

In these words there are two things to be noticed;

I. The command—

In its primary and literal sense, it refers to the putting away of their molten images which they had made to worship. But the terms used are nearly the same as those by which the first commandment in the Decalogue is expressed; and therefore we must consider them as extending also to the idolatry of the heart. Indeed, idolatry is, as St. Paul expresses it, "a worshipping and serving of the creature more than the Creator, who is God over all, blessed for ever[b]:" and consequently, we are here forbidden to pay to any creature that regard which is due to God alone, or to make it the chief object of,

1. Our love—

[In a subordinate way we may love the creature, but not so as to put it in competition with God. There is nothing in the whole universe which we should desire, or seek, in comparison of Him; nor any thing which we should not willingly part with, rather than offend him——— The state of our minds towards God should be like that of David, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[c]." To make pleasure, or riches, or honour, or any thing but God, our chief good, is idolatry[cc].]

2. Our fear—

[Scarcely do any begin to fear God, but their acknowledgment of him is retarded by the fear of man. Those who were never ashamed of sin, and who were wont to commit all manner of iniquity with greediness, are filled with apprehensions lest their change of sentiment should be discovered, and they should be called

[b] Rom. i. 25. [c] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

[cc] Phil. iii. 19. "Whose *god* is their belly." Col. iii. 5. "Covetousness, which is idolatry."

called to suffer reproach or persecution for the Lord's sake. But all such fear argues a forgetfulness of God[d], who alone is worthy to be feared[e] ——— If we regard God as we ought to do, our answer to every cowardly thought will be, "The Lord is my strength and my salvation; Whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom then shall I be afraid[f]?"]

3. Our confidence—

[When trials of any kind arise, we almost universally turn our eyes to the creature, rather than to God: either we look to our own wisdom and energy to deliver us, or to the favour and exertion of our fellow-creatures: we can scarcely ever realize the thought of a superintending Providence, who is able and willing to interpose for us: we are apt rather to imagine, that it would be an insult to the Most High to suppose that he will trouble himself about such trifling concerns as ours. In like manner, if our trials be of a spiritual nature, we look to our own wisdom to guide us, our own righteousness to justify us, and our own strength to obtain for us the victory over all our spiritual enemies. But in all this we greatly dishonour God, in whom should be all our trust for body and for soul, for time and for eternity[g] ——— In all such creature-confidence we manifest an entire departure of heart from God, and subject ourselves to his just and heavy displeasure[h].]

The equity of this command is strongly marked in,

II. The reason with which it is enforced—

Though God might well require obedience on the sole ground of his own authority, yet he is graciously pleased to assign a reason for this command; a reason, which, whilst it evinces the equity of the command, shews how deeply we are interested in obeying it. There is nothing besides God that can save us,

1. In this world—

[Suppose that all the wealth and honour that ever were possessed by man were centered in one person, would they ward off the incursions of disease, or repel the assaults of death? Would they even secure their own continuance, so that they should not speedily give way to poverty and disgrace? In the event of any great reverse of circumstances, will those perishing vanities assuage the anguish of a broken bone, or calm the tempest of a troubled spirit? Will a guilty conscience be quieted by them, or death be divested of its sting? Disease and death have no respect of

[d] Isai. li. 12, 13. [e] Luke xii. 4, 5. Isai. viii. 12, 13.
[f] Ps. xxvii. 1. [g] Ps. xi. 1, 4. [h] Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

of persons; nor will peace of mind be procured by high-sounding titles, or great possessions. It is God alone that can avert trouble, or sanctify it to our good. He can keep us unhurt, when thousands are falling on our right hand, and on our left: or, if he see fit to send us tribulation, he can enable us to rejoice and glory in it: and as for death, he has numbered it among the treasures of his people, whom he enables to long for it, that they may be with Christ, in complete and everlasting felicity — — — If then we look only to our happiness in this present life, who can bear a comparison with Jehovah, as the source of it to those who trust in him?]

2. In the world to come—

[If the vanities of time and sense can do nothing for us in this present life, how much less can they in the life to come! There they cannot so much as purchase for us a drop of water to cool our tongue. But oh! what a Saviour will Jehovah be! yea, what crowns and kingdoms will he bestow on his believing and obedient people! — — —Behold the Rich Man stripped of all his transient joys, and plunged into that abyss of misery which once he depised! Behold, on the other hand, the once destitute and neglected Lazarus in the bosom of his God! Which of the two had chosen the better part; he who had walked in the ways of this world, and made Mammon his god; or he who had sought Jehovah as his God and portion? Truly, one glance of the celestial world is quite sufficient to evince the reasonableness of the injunction given us in our text — — —]

This subject may be IMPROVED,

1. For our conviction—

[It is an awful truth, that instead of preferring God before every thing, we have preferred every thing before him. Only let us compare the anxiety we have felt about created objects, with that which we have felt in reference to God, and we shall need no further evidence of our being idolaters in the sight of God. What then have we reason to expect at his hands, in the day when he shall judge the world? Let us not judge of ourselves by some of the grosser sins which are injurious to society, but by those which strike at the honour and authority of God. Then we shall see, that, instead of being a Saviour to us, we have reason to fear lest he arise and plead his own cause, and become an avenger of his own insulted Majesty.]

2. For our consolation—

[If we take Jehovah for our God, there is not any good thing which we may not expect at his hands. The declaration that there is no Saviour beside him, is, in fact, an assurance, that he will be a Saviour to us, and do for us more than the whole

universe

universe can do. We may view salvation in all its bearings, and in its utmost extent; and then say, "All this will my God *be to* me; all this he will *do for* me." We cannot possibly raise our expectation too high; for "he will do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think:" nor need it be any grief to us that there is no Saviour besides him; for we shall want no other: He is almighty, and will be all-sufficient———]

DCXII.

DIRECTIONS FOR AN ACCEPTABLE APPROACH TO GOD.

Hos. xiv. 1—3. *O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Ashur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our Gods: for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*

FOR the encouragement of all who feel the burthen of their sins, God has declared, yea has sworn, that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live:" and the whole Scriptures bear testimony to that blessed truth. But, lest any should be discouraged by the idea that they know not how to approach him acceptably, it has pleased God to prescribe the very "words" whereby he would have them address him. And assuredly, if he had consulted all the weary and heavy-laden sinners in the universe, and had permitted them, or any individual among them, to dictate to him what expressions he should prescribe, the whole world could never have suggested any that were more suited to the necessities of men, or more satisfactory to their minds, than those recorded in our text.

In the words before us, we see, not merely our general warrant for returning to the Lord, but more particularly,

I. What petitions to offer—

[What would any one who felt the burthen of sin, and a restoration to the Divine favour, desire? What but a *full* remission of all his sins, and a *free* communication of all spiritual

ritual and eternal blessings? He would wish for pardon to be *complete;* because if so much as one sin were left upon his soul, it would inevitably plunge him into everlasting perdition———He would also wish for his reception to be perfectly *gratuitous,* because he can never do any thing to merit it at the hands of God———Behold then, it is precisely in this way that we are directed to pray; "Take away *all* iniquity, and receive us *graciously.*" And let it be remembered, that this address is not put into the mouths of those only who have contracted a less measure of guilt than others, but of all, to whatever extent "their iniquities" may have abounded, and to whatever depth they may have "fallen" by them. If only we have a desire to "return to the Lord our God," we are the persons invited and commanded to return *in this way.*]

In our text, we are further told,

II. What promises to make—

We must not imagine that we can make to God any adequate *return* for his mercies towards us; nor must we presume to offer any thing to him as an *inducement* to exercise mercy towards us: nor in any point of view whatever must we promise any thing in our own strength. But his mercies undoubtedly call for the best return that we can make; and they lay us under an obligation to do our utmost to please and serve him. Whatever tribute we can render to him, we should: and he here tells us what he will accept at our hands, namely, the tribute of,

1. A grateful heart—

[The blood of bulls or "*calves*" is no longer required of us: there are other and better *sacrifices* which he expects us to offer, namely, "the calves of our lips," or the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving[a]. And these are the offerings which all who are looking to him for mercy desire to offer. In fact, the more any persons are bowed down with a sense of sin, the more they are ready to say, How shall I praise God, if ever I should obtain mercy at his hands! If ever God should admit me to a participation of his kingdom and glory, there will not be one in heaven that will shout the praises of redeeming love so loud as *I.* This tribute therefore the pardoned sinner will delight to pay———]

2. A devoted life—

[To turn from sin, and especially from our besetting sins, is indispensably required of all who seek for mercy at God's hands[b] ———The besetting sins of Israel were, creature-confidence, and idolatry:

[a] Ps. l. 13, 14, 23. [b] Heb. xii. 1.

idolatry: they were always looking to Egypt or Assyria for help, rather than to God; and giving to dumb idols the worship that was due to him alone. These evils therefore they were to renounce; and an engagement to renounce them was required of all who desired the remission of their former sins. Thus, in approaching the Most High God, and supplicating mercy from him, we should determine, with God's help, never more to provoke the Lord to jealousy by a renewal of those sins of which we profess to have repented. Our besetting sins in particular must be searched out: and whatever they may have been, whether of a spiritual or carnal nature, we must engage, through grace, to mortify and subdue them ———We must engage, in dependence upon God, to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."]

As great earnestness is required in our prayers, we are taught,

III. What pleas to urge—

[God indeed is not, nor can be, wrought upon by any considerations that we can propose: but for the stirring up of our own souls it is proper and necessary that we should enforce our petitions with becoming pleas. But where shall we find any consideration fit to be presented to the Deity? No where, but in his own perfections, or in his gracious promises. Here however we are at no loss: the compassions of our God are infinite; and may well be pleaded by those who feel their need of mercy. "In Him the fatherless findeth mercy:" in him, too, the guilty, as well as the destitute, find mercy. Search the records of his word; and this truth will be seen written as with a sun-beam. Mark that stupendous effort of mercy, the gift of his only dear Son to the accursed death of the cross! mark the invitations, the promises, the expostulations, the complaints; "Wilt thou not be made clean? Oh! when shall it once be?" Mark these, I say; and they form such a plea, as must satisfy the most doubting mind, and turn to transports of joy the apprehensions of every desponding soul———]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who refuse to turn to God—

[Alas! how many turn a deaf ear to the solicitations of heaven! "How often would the Saviour gather us under his wings, and we will not?" But, if you will not turn at God's reproof, what will ye answer him in the day when ye shall judge the world? Low as "ye are fallen," he now is willing to raise you up: but all possibility of recovery will then be past; and you will sink yet lower still, even into the bottomless abyss of misery. "O consider this, ye that forget God; lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you."]

2. To

2. To those who are beginning to return—

[Mind that you return in his appointed way. Seek not merely a deliverance from wrath, but a restoration to the state from whence ye are fallen. Look back on man in his primeval state, and see how Adam walked with God in Paradise: *that* is the pattern that you should endeavour to follow, and the standard to which you should aspire. Or, if he be too far removed from your apprehensions, look at the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and see how he walked in the midst of this ungodly world: and endeavour to "walk as he walked." For the remission of your sins, and your restoration to the Divine favour, let the mercy of God in Christ Jesus be your only plea, your only hope: and, for the honouring of your reconciled God, let the sacrifice of praise be continually offered to him on the altar of your hearts, and every defilement be banished without hesitation or reserve. Thus coming to him, you shall never be cast out; but shall surely be received to a participation of his favour, and to a possession of his glory.]

DCXIII.

THE BLESSINGS THAT PENITENTS MAY EXPECT.

Hos. xiv. 4. *I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.*

MEN who have never seen the evil of sin are ready to imagine that God will not punish: under the idea of advancing the attribute of mercy, they deprive the Deity of all justice, holiness, and truth. On the other hand, when they are awakened to a due sight and sense of sin, they suppose that God can never forgive such vile and guilty creatures as themselves: they are now as prone to limit his mercy, as before they were to extend it beyond all bounds of truth and soberness. Nor is this disposition found only in one or two instances: hard thoughts of God, and desponding thoughts of their own state, are very common amongst those who begin to repent; and therefore God is particularly solicitous to impress us with a confidence in his mercy. When he proclaimed his name to Moses, there were a great many expressions declarative of his mercy, while there was only one that described his justice. So we shall find, that

that there is scarcely one threatening in all the Book of God, which is not followed by some free and gracious promise. In the passage before us, he has been exhorting the ten tribes to return unto him: he has put words into their mouths, and taught them how to approach him acceptably: and for their further encouragement, he promises to vouchsafe them the richest of all mercies; "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What blessings penitents may expect—

[We cannot easily conceive any description of sinners to be worse than those to whom the prophet was writing: this whole prophecy is filled with the most grievous accusations against them: yet God encourages them to repent; and, on the first appearance of penitence and contrition, he sends them this heart-reviving message, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely."

The first blessing then that every penitent may expect is, that God will heal his backslidings. Sin of every kind, but more especially backsliding, makes a grievous wound in the soul. What pain and anguish did Peter feel, when he went out and wept bitterly! How deeply was David stricken, when he "roared for the disquietness of his heart!" He compares his misery to that occasioned by broken bones; and prays, that God would "make the bones which He had broken, to rejoice." Yet grievous as these wounds are, God will heal them, if we be truly penitent. There are two ways in which he will heal sin: its *guilt* he will heal, by the blood of his Son; its *power and pollution*, by the influences of his Spirit.

He will heal its *guilt, by the blood of his Son:* there is no other balm than this: this alone can avail for the remission of sin: nothing but that which satisfied God will ever satisfy us: nothing but that blood which made an atonement for sin, can ever wash away its stain from our guilty consciences. *That* however will cleanse from all sin: God once opened on the cross a fountain for sin and uncleanness; nor has it lost any of its cleansing efficacy: the deepest wound may be healed in a moment, if it be only sprinkled with this precious blood: nor will God ever fail to impart this balm to any soul that makes application for it: "though their sins may have been as scarlet, they shall be made white as wool; and though they may have been red as crimson, they shall become white as snow."

But God will *destroy the power*, as well as cleanse the guilt of

of our backsliding: and this he will do *by the influences of his Spirit.* It would be to little purpose that he forgave the guilt, if he did not also subdue the power, of our corruptions: for, however frequently they might be forgiven, they would still rage with unabated fury; the wounds healed for an instant would still be breaking out afresh; nor would our souls attain to any abiding purity or peace. God therefore will cast salt into the bitter fountain of our hearts: he will "put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes:" he will give us "grace sufficient for us:" he will strengthen us to resist temptation, and to fulfil our duties: and though we cannot expect to arrive at sinless perfection whilst we are in this world, yet shall we be so far healed, that "no sin whatever shall have allowed dominion over us."

This then is the first blessing which every penitent may expect: the guilt and power of his sins, yea, even of his most grievous backsliding, shall be healed; and, whereas there was "no soundness in him, but (as the prophet says) wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores," "his health shall spring forth speedily," "the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."

But is this all that the penitent may expect? No; God has in store for him an higher and richer blessing: it is great indeed to have one's backslidings healed; but it is greater still to enjoy the light of God's countenance, and to have his love shed abroad in one's heart: yet this also shall be vouchsafed to every repenting sinner: God says in my text, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely." God will feel a joy and a delight over the returning Prodigal; "To this man," says he, "will I *look*, that is of an humble and contrite spirit:" I will fix my eyes upon him for good; I will look upon him with complacency: though burning seraphs surround my throne, and myriads of angels brighter than the sun encompass me around, I will look through all their shining ranks, nor shall all of them together divert my attention from the contrite sinner: "To this man will I *look*:" from whomsoever I hide my eyes, I will be sure to look on him with pleasure and complacency: "I will rejoice over him with joy; I will rest in my love; I will joy over him with singing." What an unspeakable blessing is this! To have God himself delighting in us, and shedding abroad his love in our hearts, this is inestimable indeed! He adds moreover, "I will love them *freely*;" i.e. *without any desert in them, without any reluctance in himself.* Were he to wait till they had something in themselves worthy to attract his notice, they could have no *hope*: to all eternity they must remain poor, helpless, miserable, undone creatures: they could never of themselves entertain so much as one good thought; much less could they do any thing to merit God's esteem: God therefore will not wait for any thing

in them to attract his regard: if only they be sorry for their sins, and bewail them before him in secret, he will love them *freely*; not for their sakes, but for his own; not because they are good, but because he will shew forth the freeness of his grace. And, as He will love them without any desert in them, so will he love them without any reluctance in himself: he delights in the exercise of mercy: it is the very joy of his heart to manifest his mercy to all that call upon him in truth. When our iniquities compel him to give us up, then he is all backwardness and reluctance; "How shall I give thee up? my bowels are troubled for thee." But when we desire to return to him, he never deliberates; he never says, "How shall I receive such a sinner as thou art?" We may see in the parable of the Prodigal Son what is his conduct towards every repenting sinner: instead of hesitating whether he should receive the Prodigal, he ran to meet him; instead of upbraiding him, he interrupts him in his confession, and seals up his lips with kisses; instead of granting his request and making him the lowest of his servants, he treats him as his best-beloved son, clothes him in the richest garments, and kills the fatted calf for him. Thus does God towards every penitent: and were every soul as much disposed to receive mercy as God is to shew mercy, there would never so much as one perish, even to the end of the world.

These blessings then may every penitent expect: God has here, as also in many other passages, expressly bound himself by his own voluntary promise; so that every penitent may expect these blessings upon the ground of God's truth and faithfulness.]

But there is another ground mentioned in our text: we proceed therefore to notice,

II. On what ground they may expect them—

[This part of our subject will require peculiar care and attention, lest we be misunderstood.

Observe the manner in which the last words of our text are introduced: God says, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: *for* mine anger *is* turned away from him:" he is here endeavouring to encourage penitents; and therefore he tells them that he will do great things for them, *because* his anger *is already* turned away from them. After much and careful examination of the words, we are persuaded that this is the true sense and meaning of them; and that they are intended to convey one of the most encouraging truths that can be found in all the Book of God, namely, that our repentance is a proof of God's anger being turned away from us, and that the removal of his anger from us is a pledge of greater blessings; or, in other words, that *our having the grace of repentance is a ground whereon we may expect the richest blessings.*

But we will explain ourselves more fully.

Repentance

Repentance has not in itself any thing meritorious; nor can the mere work of repentance ever afford a ground of hope towards God: to suppose that our repentance can merit any thing at God's hands, or bear any part in our justification before God, would be to subvert the whole Gospel, and to render Christ's death of none effect. Satan cannot take any more effectual method to bring souls to perdition, than to make them trust in their own repentance. Let us not then be understood as though we would lead any man to trust in his repentance; for we say again, that it is impossible to take a surer road to destruction than he does who trusts in any repentance or righteousness of his own. But, in another sense, repentance may encourage us to hope; for repentance is a sign and evidence of grace; and grace given, warrants us to expect more grace: and therefore we say, repentance is in some sense a ground of hope: and this, we doubt not, is the meaning of the prophet, in our text. The latter part of our text is a reason for the former part of it: God says in the former part, "I will do so and so;" and then, in the latter, he tells them why they may expect him to do so and so, namely, "because mine anger is turned away from them:" he does not say, "shall be turned away," but *is*, is already turned away. Their being penitent was a proof that they had grace; their having grace was a proof that God's anger was turned away from them; and the removal of his anger from them was a ground whereon they might expect further blessings from him. To make this matter more clear, let us substantiate two things: First, *Repentance is an evidence of grace:* no one can doubt that, unless he supposes that he can repent without the grace of God: but a man must be ignorant indeed to frame any such conception as that: if we believe any thing of the Scriptures, or know any thing of our own hearts, we must know, that "Christ is ascended up on high, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins;" and that we must acknowledge our repentance, as well as "every other good and perfect gift, to be from above, even from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning."—It being therefore past a doubt that repentance is an evidence of grace, let us prove next, that *Grace given warrants us to expect more grace.* The Scriptures plainly assert this; for, On what ground was Paul so confident that God would carry on the good work in the hearts of his Philippian converts, and perform it until the day of Christ? On this ground, namely, "that he had begun a good work in them:" so that, to say the least, grace bestowed is a ground of encouragement whereon we may hope to obtain more grace.

The clear indisputable conclusion from hence is, that if any man has grace to repent, he may take encouragement from it to hope that God will give him more grace: if he has so good an evidence that God's anger is already turned away from him, he has

has good reason to hope that God will do more for him, that he will heal his backslidings, and love him freely.

By way of confirming this blessed truth, we will refer you to those memorable words of David[a]; where you will see, that he draws the very same conclusion from the very same premises; and that too in such a way as evidently supposes his argument to be incontrovertible: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: Wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living?"]

Let us now conclude, with an INFERENCE or two from what has been said:

1. What astonishing consolation is here for all that desire to turn unto God!

[A person may, from a discovery of his sins, be led to say, "There is no hope:" more especially those who have once "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come," if they have lost their good impressions, and turned back to the world, are tempted to despair: Satan would suggest to them, that, because they have sinned against light and knowledge, they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. But observe what care God takes to dispel our fears, and to encourage our return: he does not merely say, "I will heal their *sins*, but I will heal their *backsliding*;" thereby obviating at once all their objections. He knows how Satan will take advantage of them; that he will suggest desponding thoughts, and make them believe their sins are too great to be forgiven; and therefore God specifies the greatest of all sins, "I will heal their *backsliding*," their sins committed against all their own vows and resolutions, their sins committed after the greatest mercies had been vouchsafed to them; yes, even those, says God, will I heal: I will wash them away in the blood of my dear Son, and blot them out as a thick cloud: I will cast them behind my back, and remember them no more; I will pour the balm of Gilead into your wounded spirits, and speak peace to your afflicted consciences. Still Satan suggests, "But you will fall again, and then your last end shall be worse than the beginning." No, says God, it shall not be so; only come to me, and I will keep you from falling; trust in me, and "you shall never fall; but an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of your Lord and Saviour:" I will heal you, not only by my pardoning, but also by my renewing grace: and so effectually will I heal your wounds, that I will even renew you after mine own image, in righteousness and true holiness. Perhaps Satan will still urge, "But you are not worthy;" and thus prevent your trusting in God: but says God, I do not look for worthiness in the creature; I will love them *freely*;

[a] Ps. lvi. 13.

freely; without the smallest regard to any thing in them: I will love them for mine own name sake, and "have mercy merely because I will have mercy." But yet Satan suggests, "This is not for *you:* God is your enemy, and you have nothing to do with these promises:" but to this also God has given you a certain answer; Are you truly desirous to have your backslidings healed, and to live in the enjoyment of God's free love and favour? then says God, "Mine anger is turned away from you:" it not only shall be, but *is;* that very desire is a fruit of my love; that little repentance which you exercise, is the gift of my grace; and you are to take it as a pledge and earnest of richer blessings; you are to take encouragement from what I have given, to expect from me all that I can give: only follow the direction I have given you, "Take with you words, and say unto me, Take away all iniquity, and receive me graciously," and I will answer the very desires of your heart; for "I will heal your backslidings, which are the greatest of all sins, and will love you freely; and, lest you should doubt this, I tell you, that, if such be the desires of your heart, mine anger is turned away from you"———

See now, my Brethren, what rich consolation here is for every drooping and desponding soul! O cease to listen to the suggestions of Satan; cease to entertain hard thoughts of God! Only come to Jesus, and see what a gracious Saviour he is; how freely he will love, how effectually he will heal. Bring all your unworthiness along with you; bring all your sins, and all your backslidings; and if only ye desire to have them all healed, surely ye shall soon feel the cleansing efficacy of his blood, and the renewing influence of his Spirit: and when he *thus* loveth you, he will "love you to the end."———]

2. What cause of fear is here to those who are living in wilful sin!

[If you be not seeking deliverance from sin, even from your darling and besetting sin, surely your case is awful indeed: the anger of God is not turned away from you. No: if there be any truth in the Divine record, the wrath of God abideth on you. If you seek not to have your backslidings healed, how is it possible that God should love you? It is said, "He hateth all the workers of iniquity," and, "He is angry with the wicked every day." Deceive not therefore your own souls: ye backsliders in particular, who have fallen from your first love, deceive not yourselves; for, except ye repent, God shall remove your candlestick, and your lamp shall go out for ever. Examine well your own souls; see whether the world have not crept in; whether some accursed weeds and thorns have not choked the seed, so that you bring no fruit to perfection? If you can be easy in such a state, there is reason to fear that you are given up by God to judicial hardness: but perhaps you are not easy, yet your uneasiness does

not

not stir you up to repent: you do not unfeignedly seek grace and mercy from the Saviour's hands; you do not plead with him in earnest; you do not go with strong crying and tears to implore deliverance: what then can ye expect, but to perish by the wounds which your backslidings have made? Still, however, there is mercy in store for you: God desires not your death, but rather that you turn from your wickedness and live. O then, "turn, and live ye!" Be importunate at the throne of Grace; plead with Him that died for sinners: remember, He is the Sun of Righteousness, whose beams are healing; and "the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." He is called, in Exodus xv. 26, "The Lord who healeth thee;" and he says to every convinced sinner, "If thou wilt return, return unto me, O Israel!" "Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out"———]

DCXIV.

GOD'S NOTICE OF PENITENTS.

Hos. xiv. 8. *Ephraim* shall say, *What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard* him, *and observed him: I* am *like a green fir-tree: from me* is *thy fruit found.*

THE conversion of a sinner is a work of infinite difficulty; no efforts of the creature can accomplish it; none but He who spake the universe into existence, can renew the soul: but when his time is come, the work is done both easily and effectually. As a ship, forsaken by the ebbing tide, can never be dragged along, but is easily put in motion when borne up by the returning waters, so the sinner is immoveable in his iniquities, till the Spirit of God flows in upon him: and then "old things quickly pass away, and, behold, all things become new." This observation is verified continually before our eyes: persons who have been warned and intreated for many years, and have not only withstood all the most awful and endearing considerations, but have been more and more hardened by the means used to convert them, have at last been turned to God through a secret and invisible influence upon their souls, and have become burning and shining lights in their day and generation. Such were the effects produced on the day of Pentecost, when thousands to whom our blessed Lord had preached

preached in vain, and on whom the most stupendous miracles had wrought no change, were constrained to renounce all their former habits and opinions, and to embrace a new, a spiritual, a despised, and persecuted religion. A similar instance we have in the passage before us. If we look to the account given us of Ephraim in chap. iv. 17. we shall find, that he was "*joined* to idols," yea, so glued to them, that neither warnings from man, nor judgments from God, could separate him from them; and therefore God said respecting him, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone;" it is to no purpose to use any further means for his recovery; he is incorrigible, and irreclaimable. But behold the change, when once God is pleased to put forth his power! When once HE says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will be as the dew to Israel," "I will manifest my grace and mercy to his soul," the obdurate heart relents; the abandoned sinner turns from his iniquities, and even with indignation and abhorrence renounces his most beloved lusts; "Ephraim saith, What have I to do any more with idols?" If God therefore have such pity on an impenitent transgressor, we shall not wonder at the gracious declaration which he makes for the comfort of this penitent and returning sinner; "I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir-tree: from me is thy fruit found."

In discoursing on these words, we shall be naturally led to shew you,

I. The disposition of the true penitent—

[The unconverted man, though he may never have bowed down to stocks and stones, is an idolater: he "loves and serves the creature more than the Creator." All indeed do not worship the same idol: one gives his heart to riches, another to honour, another to pleasure; and though all these find a higher place in our affections than we allow to God, yet each person has his favourite idol, to which he is in a more especial manner devoted: but when grace has renewed the heart, then the penitent says with Ephraim of old, "What have I to do any more with idols?" His disposition is, To renounce all sins in general,—his besetting sin in particular;—and this too with indignation and abhorrence.

He

He renounces *all sins in general.*—A person who is not truly penitent may exchange one sin for another; he may exchange lewdness and intemperance for the love of honour and ambition; he may turn from prodigality to avarice; or from indifference and profaneness to Pharisaism and hypocrisy. But he never remits one sin without taking some other in its stead; yea, he frequently puts more into the scale of pride and conceit, than ever he took out of that of sensuality or profaneness. But it is not thus with the true penitent: he has commenced a war against sin in general; he endeavours to attack it in all quarters; he knows that sin is idolatry, in that it is a preference given to the creature above God himself; and therefore, without making any reserves, he determines to extirpate sin, root and branch, if possible, and says, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

But he more particularly devotes to destruction *his besetting sin.*—The besetting sin of the ten tribes was idolatry; and therefore when Ephraim is brought to repentance, he is represented as fixing his eyes more particularly on that sin. Indeed this was remarkably exemplified in the Jews, after their return from the Babylonish captivity: for though, before their captivity, they could never be kept long together from idolatry, they could not after their return be drawn to it; insomuch, that when it was proposed to set up a statue of Augustus in the Temple, the Jews determined to perish rather than submit to it. Now every man has some sin which more easily besets him: and it is oftentimes a very difficult matter to find it out, by reason of the various shapes which it assumes, and the deep recesses in which it lurks. But it is a distinguishing mark of the true penitent, that, whatever he imagines to be his besetting sin, he will be more particularly solicitous to mortify and subdue it. The hypocrite and self-deceiver will plead for his darling lust; he will make excuses for it; he will cast the blame on his constitution, or his situation in life; he will palliate his guilt, and not endure to be admonished respecting it: but the truly upright soul will be exceeding glad to discover his secret enemy, and will by prayer and all other means labour to bring him into subjection.

Nor is this all: he will prosecute his lurking foe with vigilance, and cast him out *with indignation and abhorrence.*—This is strongly intimated in the text: Ephraim does not merely resolve that he will not have any more to do with idols; but with an holy indignation against them, and an everlasting abhorrence of them, he says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" He determines never to join himself to them again: the folly and wickedness of such conduct appear to him now in such glaring colours, that he cannot endure the thought of ever relapsing into it any more. Thus it is with the true penitent: O! how does he lothe the sins that have led him captive, and the secret sins that have so defiled his conscience! how

how does he determine, if possible, to withstand the baneful influence of his in-dwelling corruption, and to watch and pray against it! How does he aggravate the guilt of his besetting lust, till he sees it in all its vileness and deformity! how unreasonable does it appear to him to harbour such an enemy in his bosom! how does he mourn because he cannot get rid of it! how desirable does the furnace itself appear, if it may but purify and refine his soul!

Say, Believer, are not these the thoughts of thy heart? Say, thou that weepest, like Mary, at thy Saviour's feet, dost thou not hate thy sins, and thyself on account of them? Couldst thou but bring forth the lurking foe, and slay him utterly, wouldst thou not rejoice? Is it not thy grief that thou canst not get more complete victory over him? Is it not thy shame that thou art at any time deceived by him? Does it not make thee loathe thyself, to think how ready thou art to favour this enemy, and to be enticed by him before thou art aware? Art thou not often filled with indignation against thyself, to think that thou shouldst ever offend thy God through the solicitations of some base lust or evil principle within thee? Yea, I go further, and ask, Dost thou not hate thyself because thou canst not hate thyself more? I know thy heart vibrates; I know it is in unison; I know there is no discordant string; I know that these must be your feelings, if you be upright before God.]

It is with pleasure therefore that I proceed to set before you,

II. The notice which God takes of this disposition—

[It is impossible that there should be the smallest good in our hearts, and God not observe it: there was but "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel" in the heart of young Abijah, and the Lord noticed it, and remembered him on account of it. The prophet Jeremiah sets this in a striking point of view: he represents Ephraim (xxxi. 18.) as mourning over his sins in secret, and God as listening to him, and at last as breaking out into this soliloquy; "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus:" then, after repeating the substance of Ephraim's complaint, he adds, in ver. 20, "Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; yea, my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy on him." Exactly thus, in my text, God hears Ephraim saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" and he adds immediately, "I have heard and observed him;" I have had my eye fixed upon him, though he did not know it; I have attended to every word he has been saying; he has not uttered a sigh, but it has entered my ears; he has not poured forth a groan, but it has pierced my heart; he has not shed a tear, but I have treasured

it

it up in my vial: he thinks I will not regard him, but I have heard and observed him all the while: there is not a thought of his heart that has escaped my notice; and what is more, I now say respecting him, and respecting all that shall resemble him even to the end of the world, "I am, and will be, to him as a green fir-tree; and of me shall his fruit be found."

I must here just observe, that the words of my text which are printed in different characters are not in the original, but are supplied by the Translators; and that therefore the verse may be read, and I think should be read, thus; "Ephraim *saith*, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him and observed him: I *will be* like a green fir-tree: of me *shall* thy fruit *be* found." The sense is the same indeed either way; only in the latter it is more clear: and according to it we have two blessed promises of God to the penitent and contrite soul, namely, that he will *afford him protection*, and *engage for his perseverance*.

First, he promises protection to the repenting sinner, "I will be as a green fir-tree." The fir-tree affords a remarkably thick shade, which cannot be penetrated either by sun or rain; so that it afforded a safe retreat, either from the rays of the meridian sun, or from the violence of the impending tempest. Conceive then a burthened sinner travelling toward Zion: see him either trembling from an apprehension of divine judgments, even of that "fire and brimstone, storm and tempest, which God will rain upon the ungodly," or fainting through the heat of temptation and persecution. What a reviving cordial to his soul is here! Let him come to me, says God; "I will be as a green fir-tree to him;" I will shelter him from the curses of my broken law; I will guard him from the fiery darts of Satan; I will hide him from the assaults of all his enemies; none shall hurt him: I will hide him in the secret of my tabernacle, even in my pavilion, where he shall have not only safety, but all manner of refreshing *viands:* "he shall sit under my shadow with great delight." Hear this, ye who desire to renounce your idols; ye who long to be delivered from the attacks of your great adversary, and to find a place of rest unto your souls: to you God says[a], "Surely I will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence: I will cover thee with my feathers, and under my wings shalt thou trust: my truth shall be thy shield and buckler." You know how our blessed Saviour complains of the Jews, that when he would often have gathered them, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, they would not: O! let him not utter the same complaint against you: *they* indeed would not flee to him, because they would not believe their danger; but *you* are in danger of keeping from him through a doubt of his ability or willingness to protect you: but, O! flee to him; he is a sure Refuge: only rest under his shadow, and

[a] Ps. xci. 3, 4.

and you need not fear: none can ever hurt you, if you be found under the shadow of his wings: he promises that he will be as a green fir-tree to you, and he will fulfil his word unto all that put their trust in him.

The other promise which God here makes to the repenting sinner is, that he himself will engage for his perseverance in the ways of holiness; "Of me shall thy fruit be found." The penitent no sooner determines to cast his idols to the moles and to the bats, than fears arise in his mind, and he says, "But how shall I do this? Who is sufficient for these things?" To silence therefore all such doubts as these, God himself undertakes the work; "Be not afraid, sinner;" I will take that work upon myself; "my grace shall be sufficient for thee;" I will furnish thee with strength according to thy day of trial; "Of ME shall thy fruit be found:" "I will make thee fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness: the things thou desirest are the fruits of my Spirit; and my Spirit shall produce them in thee."

Can we conceive a more comforting declaration than this? If the drooping sinner were permitted to dictate what God should say to him, could he devise any thing more calculated to comfort and refresh the soul? My dear Brethren, behold your God undertaking for you, not merely to bring you to heaven, (for that would be a small matter, if you were not made holy,) but to deliver you from all your sins. Hear his gracious words, as they are recorded by Ezekiel; "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you: a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will cause you to keep my statutes and my judgments to do them." Hear again what he says to the same purpose by Jeremiah; "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not depart from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me: yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul." Is it possible for God to express more earnestness in your cause, or a more full determination to preserve you in spite of all your in-dwelling corruptions; or rather, I should say, to deliver you from them? O! lift up your heads, ye drooping penitents, for your redemption draweth nigh: only commit yourselves into the hands of a faithful God and a loving Saviour: there is a fulness of all that you can want treasured up in Jesus; and out of his fulness ye may all receive, grace for grace. He is the Vine, from whom you must receive sap and nourishment continually; "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in him: separate from him ye can do nothing: but if ye abide in him, ye shall bring forth much fruit;" yea, ye may "do all things, through Christ strengthening you." However inveterate therefore your corruptions be, fear not, but look unto Christ: instead of being terrified,

rified, as though they were invincible, let the sight of them remind you what great things the Saviour has undertaken for you: instead of despairing on account of your own weakness, rather learn to glory in it, as the means of displaying your Saviour's strength. Do not misunderstand me, as though I would have you glory in sin: God forbid! sin is, and ought to be, your shame and aversion: but I say again, your inability to any thing that is good ought not to discourage you, because the Apostle says, "When you are weak, then are you strong:" and therefore, while you lament your sins, you may at the same time "glory in your weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon you." Your extremity shall assuredly be the season of God's interposition: "In the mount of difficulty the Lord shall be seen;" according as it is written in Deut. xxxii. 36. "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left."]

Here let us close, with one obvious REFLECTION—

Do ye not see from hence how excellent repentance is?

[Whether it be viewed in *its nature* or *its consequences*, surely it is a most inestimable blessing. What can be more desirable than to be delivered from those base lusts and idolatrous affections, which rob *us* of our happiness, and *God* of his glory? If we had discarded all our idols, and were determined to have nothing more to do with them, we should have a very heaven upon earth; especially if we found the grace of Christ sufficient for us; as we certainly should do, if we sought it humbly, and depended on it simply. God will never disappoint our expectations which are founded on his promises: if indeed we presume to limit him with respect to the time and manner in which he shall deliver us, we may be disappointed; but if we commit ourselves to him, to carry on his work in the time and manner that he sees fit, we shall never be disappointed: he will assuredly cover our defenceless heads, and make fruitful our withered branches: he will perfect that which concerns us, and fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness; nor will he ever leave us till he has accomplished all the good things which he has spoken concerning us. And is this the nature, is this the consequence of repentance? Shall every contrite soul have an experience of these things? O that God may grant us all, "repentance unto life, even that repentance which is not to be repented of!" May we thus experience the power and grace of Christ, and find everlasting rest unto our souls!

But let not those whose hearts are yet cleaving to their idols conclude themselve penitent. What repentance has the *worldling*, who is minding nothing but his earthly business? Surely mammon

mon is his God; and, till this idol be put away, there is no repentance, no salvation to his soul. Nor has the *proud, passionate, carnal, worldly-minded professor* any pretensions to repentance; for what repentance has he, when he is yet harbouring idols in his heart? No, professor, thou must be delivered from thine idols; thy besetting sin in particular must be lamented, lothed, and mortified: nor, till this be thine experience, wilt thou have any defence against the impending wrath of God: thou mayest talk of Christ, and have a clear head-knowledge of the truth; but knowledge will not serve instead of repentance: thou must be divorced from thy lusts, thine evil tempers, and every thing else to which thou hast been glued. Christ gave himself to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; and therefore, if thou wouldest ever dwell under the shadow of God in heaven, see that this fruit be found on thee on earth. God is willing to produce it in thee: look therefore to Him; and he will be as the dew unto you; he will heal your backslidings, and love you freely———]

DCXV.

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE PECULIAR TO GOD'S PEOPLE.

Hos. xiv. 9. *Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.*

TO guide mankind into the way of peace, and to proclaim the glad tidings of Salvation to their souls, is certainly the most pleasant and honourable employment in the world: but it is an employment accompanied, for the most part, with heavy discouragements, and those peculiar to itself. If we labour to convey instruction in any branch of science, we find our labours attended with some degree of success to all: for though all make not the same proficiency, yet all reap some advantage. This however is very far from being the case when we would impart spiritual knowledge: some, blessed be God! receive benefit; but the generality of our hearers continue as ignorant and blind as ever: many indeed get somewhat of head-knowledge; but as to any saving experience of the things we teach (and that alone is worthy the name of knowledge), few, very few, attain to it. Nor is this unteachableness peculiar to the present age: it is frequently represented

in

in the Scriptures as a subject of lamentation, not only to the Prophets, but even to God himself. How often does God call his people foolish and unwise; and, with a mixture of tenderness and disappointment, say, "O that they were wise, and that they understood these things[a]!" Hence the inspired writers, as though they had no expectation that *all* should profit from their instructions, express themselves as looking for success only among those who were endued with heavenly wisdom. Thus the Psalmist, after expatiating largely upon the goodness of God, both in his works of providence and grace, concludes the psalm[b] with saying, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." And in nearly the same terms the prophet Hosea, having preached no less than seventy years with very little effect, and having comprised the principal and most important parts of the Divine messages in a book, concludes the whole with these most affecting words; "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right; and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein."

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. Who they are that will understand Divine things—

[The things which the prophet is speaking of in the former part of our text, are the same which he afterwards calls "the ways of the Lord." Now we might be led to suppose that he refers to the sins against which he had guarded them, the duties he had inculcated, the punishments he had denounced, and the blessings which he had promised them in the name of God; seeing that these things are the general scope of the whole book: but he limits his own words to one particular sense, and teaches us to understand him as speaking, not so much of those ways wherein God had walked towards them, as of the ways wherein they were to walk before him: and therefore the things which the wise only can understand, are the things which pertain to vital experimental religion: and indeed this best agrees with the preceding context; for through the whole chapter, God delineates the experience of true penitents, and shews, that when he shall come down as the dew upon their souls, they shall resemble the olive

[a] Deut. xxxii. 6, 29. [b] Ps. 107.

olive in their beauty, the lily in their growth, the cedar in their stability, the wines of Lebanon in their fragrancy, and the corn itself, or vine, in their fruitfulness. These things, it must be confessed, surpass the comprehension of the natural man; and therefore the prophet adds, "Who is *wise*, and *he* shall understand these things; *prudent*, and *he* shall know them."

But here we must attentively consider whom the prophet intends under the description of the "wise and prudent?" Is it worldly wisdom and worldly prudence of which he speaks in such high terms? Are these the great requisites for the right understanding of spiritual matters? Surely not; this cannot be the meaning of the prophet; for then he would directly oppose the whole tenor of the Sacred Writings. Carnal wisdom and prudence are universally represented in the Scriptures as most adverse to divine truth, and as the greatest obstacles to the attainment of spiritual knowledge. Hear how St. Paul speaks of the wisdom and prudence of this world, in 1 Cor. i. ver. 18, and following verses; "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God; for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the *wise*, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the *prudent*. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? for, after that, in the wisdom of God, *the world by wisdom knew not God*, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Then, in verse 26, he appeals to their own experience and observation; "Ye see your calling, Brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, that no flesh should glory in his presence." If any additional testimony were needed, we might take that of our Lord himself, who not only affirmed the same truth, but was exhilarated and comforted by the consideration of it, and made it the subject of his devoutest thanksgiving: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the *wise and prudent*, and hast revealed them unto babes." God indeed has been pleased in all ages to enlighten and convert some who were reputed wise; because he would shew to all the world, that his truths, however despised, were consistent with the profoundest wisdom, and capable of enlarging the most refined understanding: nevertheless, the wise and prudent of this world have always been the foremost to reject the truth of God. None cavilled more at our Lord's discourses than the Scribes and Pharisees; nor were any more contemptuous in their treatment of Paul than the philosophers at Athens. We may be sure, therefore, that such are not the persons intended by the prophet in my text.

Who then are the wise? who are the prudent? First, they are *those*

those whose understandings have been enlightened by the Holy Ghost. True "wisdom is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." We have not the smallest spark of it by nature: on the contrary, we are blind; and folly is bound up in our hearts: nor unless He, who first commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts, can we ever see one ray of that divine glory which shines in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence they who are truly wise have learned that most humiliating lesson, to "become fools, that they may be wise:" they have been deeply convinced that they needed a divine illumination, and have obtained it in answer to their prayers: to them has been fulfilled that blessed promise, "All thy children shall be taught of God." This therefore is the first part of the wise man's character, that he has been taught by the Holy Ghost. But a further mark whereby the wise and prudent are to be distinguished is, that *they view things in their proper colours:* they no longer "call good evil, and evil good; they no longer put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter;" but they see things in the light of God's word, and estimate every thing in a measure according to the judgment of God respecting it: the body appears to them of small value, when set in competition with the soul; nor do the enjoyments or sufferings of this present world appear worthy to be compared with the glory that shall ere long be revealed in them. Sin is now considered by them as a most tremendous evil, more to be shunned than death itself: and a life of holiness appears to be the perfection and happiness of man. But most of all, true wisdom and prudence discover themselves in this, that they unite their influence to govern our whole lives: "I Wisdom dwell with prudence," says Solomon. They who are truly enlightened do not rest satisfied with clear notions, but desire to have their practice conformable to the convictions of their minds: they therefore take the word of God as a light to their feet and a lantern to their paths: they strive to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long: this, I say, is the best evidence of their wisdom; for indeed it is the very beginning of wisdom; as Solomon has observed, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and as Job also says, (xxviii. 28.) "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding."

We see then who are the wise and prudent. Not they who boast of their intellectual powers, and abound with human learning, but those who are taught of God to judge and act agreeably to the Sacred Oracles.

Now these persons shall have a true knowledge and understanding of divine things: the ways of the Lord shall be clear to them from their own experience: they shall know how delightful it is to live a life of faith on the Son of God: they shall understand what it is to have fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ: they shall enjoy that sweet security which they possess

who

who are instructed in the Covenant of Grace, and who know the faithfulness of a promise-keeping God. These indeed are secrets hid from the natural man; but we are assured, that they are, and shall be, revealed unto those who are spiritual: David says, (and he himself had experienced the truth of it,) "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant."]

But this knowledge is peculiar to the persons above described; and this leads me to shew you,

II. Why this knowledge is peculiar to them—

[Two reasons the prophet assigns; *one* taken *from the peculiar excellence of the things known*, and *the other* from *the use which different persons* make of them.

The first reason is taken from the excellence of the things known—"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? *for the ways of the Lord are right.*" There is a rectitude in a life of godliness; there is something in it which is *fit and proper in itself*; something which is *agreeable to the mind and will of God*; something which is *calculated to promote the perfection and happiness of man*. The most refined reason cannot conceive any thing *more fit and becoming*, than that He, whose loveliness and loving-kindness are infinite, should be the supreme object of our affections; or that He who is omnipotent, immutable, and eternal, should be honoured, trusted, and obeyed with our whole hearts. To a carnal eye, that views only the Majesty of God, it might appear *unsuitable, that the Deity* should condescend to commune with such sinful worms: but his condescension and grace reflect a lustre on all his other attributes, and overwhelm us with wonder and astonishment. As for the *pleasantness* and peace which are found *in the ways* of religion, or the effect of it on our hearts and lives, we have the united testimony of all who ever devoted themselves to it, that "in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward." Indeed it is this very excellency which helps the godly to know and understand the things themselves; at least it helps to enlarge and perfect their knowledge of them. The Holy Spirit first leads them to a life of godliness, and then discovers to them how fit in itself, how honourable to God, and beneficial to man, such a life is; and then this discovery confirms them in their ways; confirms them, I say, beyond every thing in the world; so that though they began to walk in the Lord's ways from the fear of hell, and from a desire after heaven, they now walk in his ways because they are *right*: they now see, that to "yield themselves a living sacrifice to God is the most *reasonable* service" in the world: and so much is their knowledge and understanding confirmed by this discovery of the rectitude and excellency of God's ways, that they

they would wish to walk in them, even though there were no heaven to reward their obedience, nor any hell to punish their disobedience: they can say with David, "I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be RIGHT, and I hate every false way;" that is, "My soul approves the way of duty, therefore would I walk in it, and not for the sake of the reward: I hate sin, therefore would I avoid it to the uttermost, and not merely because I am afraid of punishment: I would not be excused from my duty, if I might; nor would I practise sin, though I might do it with impunity." On the other hand, this very excellency is one reason why none but the wise and prudent can know these things. A weak and disordered eye cannot bear the light. This is true with respect to spiritual light, as well as to the light of the sun. Our Lord says, that the ungodly "hate the light, neither come to the light; they love darkness rather than light." If we draw a picture of morality, the amiableness of it will commend itself to them; but if we set before them a life of godliness, they are dazzled by it, they are hurt with it; its splendour, like that of the sun, overwhelms them: it is so high above them, that they cannot comprehend it: not having a spiritual discernment, they account it foolishness: it appears to them more like the ravings of enthusiasm, than the words of truth and soberness: they know not how to annex a proper meaning to our words: being low and carnal in their apprehensions, they cannot rise above a carnal sense of our expressions. We see therefore, that the very excellency of these things is one reason why the true knowledge of them is peculiar to the wise and prudent. Thus it was in our Lord's time: he told his hearers, that the reason they murmured at his words was, that their apprehensions were carnal, whereas his words were spiritual: "Doth this offend you? The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." At another time he said, "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my words."

The other reason assigned by the prophet is taken from the use which different persons make of spiritual truths: "The just," he observes, "will walk in them, but the transgressors will fall therein."

Now the just and righteous, as far as they are acquainted with the ways of God, will endeavour to walk in them: they desire to reduce every truth to practice, and wish to have even "the thoughts of their hearts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ:" and their knowledge is wonderfully furthered and advanced by this disposition: their apprehension is quickened by the previous disposition which they feel to embrace the truth; and their memory is strengthened by the love which they bear towards it, when once it is discovered. Hence unenlightened persons, who have studied the Scriptures critically for many years, are often not half so well acquainted with them as others of very inferior abilities,

abilities, who, under the influence of such a disposition, have studied them but a short time: to *the one*, the Bible is "a sealed book;" its contents are dark, intricate, and unintelligible: *to the other*, it is clear, perspicuous, and easy to be understood: the *one* meets with nothing but difficulties and stumbling-blocks; *the other* has a clue to every truth contained in it. And whence is it that the one knows the mysteries of the kingdom, while the other sees nothing but dark and obscure parables? Our Lord enables us to solve this difficulty; "If any man," says he, "will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God;" his disposition and desire to do my will shall operate in such a manner as greatly to facilitate the understanding of my word.

On the other hand, the indisposition which others feel towards the ways of God will prevent the introduction of Divine knowledge into the soul: "the transgressors will fall therein." The Pillar and the Cloud by which God led the Israelites, may serve to illustrate the operation of his word, by which he leads us: the cloud was a pillar of fire to give light to the Israelites by night, while it was a cloud of darkness towards the Egyptians, insomuch that they could not advance, but were obstructed in their march by means of it. Now so it is with the word of God: to God's people, it exhibits a bright and luminous appearance, so that they can walk in the light of it: but to transgressors, who do not desire above all things to be conformed to it, it is an offence: to the former it is "a savour of life unto life;" but unto the latter it is "a savour of death unto death:" yea, Christ himself, who is the sum and substance of the Bible, is to the former "a sanctuary," but to the latter "a snare and a gin, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence," by means of which "many are snared, and taken, and fall," to their more aggravated condemnation. Daily experience shews us that the strictness and purity of God's ways are an offence unto many: they take occasion from what they hear to shew their enmity against God, more than ever they would have done, if the light had not been thus set before them: Christ being set forth, they make him only "a sign to be spoken against; and thus the thoughts of their hearts are revealed." And that this vile and wicked disposition blinds them more than ever, we are sure from the testimony of our Lord: the Pharisees had shut their hearts against conviction, and then were incensed against our Lord for intimating that they were blind; "Are we blind also?" Upon which our Lord answers them, "If ye were blind, ye would have no sin: but now ye say we see, therefore your sin remaineth." It is evident therefore, that the very opposite uses which different persons make of the ways of God, must necessarily, and of themselves, as well as by Divine appointment, contribute greatly to enlighten the one, while the others are confirmed in ignorance and unbelief.]

Let

Let us now conclude, with an APPLICATION of the foregoing truths;

1. To those who are unacquainted with the truths and ways of God—

[Many, it is to be feared, there are among you, who are wise and prudent enough with respect to the things of this world, but yet are miserably ignorant of the nature and excellency of vital godliness. Your own consciences testify, that you know not what it is to have God come down as the dew upon your souls: you know not what is meant by that beauty, that growth, that stability, that fragrancy, and that fruitfulness, which characterize the true Christian. Nay, some perhaps, instead of experiencing these things in their own souls, are hurt and offended by the very mention of them: instead of judging the ways of the Lord to be right, they are ready to condemn them as enthusiastic or righteous-overmuch. To all such persons therefore, whether they be only ignorant of these things, or have taken offence at them, we must testify, that the ways of the Lord are *right*: whatever exception may be taken against them, they will assuredly prove right in the issue: "Wisdom will be justified of all her children." We may challenge all the world to shew that there is any thing unreasonable in a life of devotedness to God, or that such a life is not calculated to make us happy. Let me therefore intreat you to seek the knowledge of these things: your not having the wisdom and learning of this world will be no obstacle to your proficiency in Divine knowledge: it is spiritual wisdom that you want: seek wisdom therefore from Him who has promised to "give it liberally, and without upbraiding:" seek prudence also; for "a prudent man," says Solomon, "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished." But if you will not be persuaded, remember what God has said, "My people perish for lack of knowledge;" and again, "They are a people of no understanding; therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour." Such declarations as these fully prove how awful it is to remain in ignorance: and therefore I intreat you all to improve your present opportunities. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and, with all your getting, get understanding."]

2. To those who know and walk in the ways of God—

[What do you owe to God, my Brethren, for the Divine wisdom and prudence which he has bestowed upon you! Surely you were once foolish and unwise, even as others; and perhaps were ready to say of those who felt what you now experience, "Thou art beside thyself: much attention to religion hath made thee

thee mad." Well, bless God that your eyes are opened, and that, though ye were once blind, ye now see. Yet rest not in what ye have attained: you know but little yet in comparison of what remains to be known: there are heights and depths in Divine things which will be opened more and more to your view to all eternity; and the promise is, that "you shall know, if you follow on to know the Lord:" therefore seek to "grow in knowledge and in grace:" while others stumble at the word, and make the ways of God an occasion of failing, do you be pressing forward; and let "your profiting appear unto all men." Pray more and more for "a spirit of wisdom and understanding;" and endeavour, with truly Christian prudence, to act up to the convictions of your conscience: so shall your knowledge and holiness advance each other, till you come to that blessed place, where faith shall be turned into sight, and hope be consummated in enjoyment.]

DCXVI.

THE REMOVAL OF JUDGMENTS PRAISED.

Joel ii. 26. *Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.*

MOST encouraging is that appellation whereby David addresses the Most High God: "O Thou that hearest prayer!" It is this view of the Deity which alone keeps men from despair, and prevents this sinful world from becoming a counterpart of hell itself. God doth indeed hear the prayer of the poor destitute, and not despise their desire. Of this there is a striking illustration in the passage before us. A plague of locusts had been sent, like an immense army, to destroy the whole land of Israel. The desolation spread by them had reduced the people to the deepest distress. But God encouraged them to humble themselves before him, and assured them, that, on their so doing, he would "be jealous for the land, and pity his people." He even tells them what answer he would give to their petitions, even such an one as should secure to them the removal of all their troubles, and a complete restoration to his favour: instead of perishing by famine, they should

"eat

"eat and be satisfied;" and instead of being put to confusion by him, they should "never more be ashamed" of their confidence in him.

The words thus explained, will lead us to consider in what light God would have us regard the removal of his judgments: it is to be regarded by us as a call,

I. To more fervent gratitude—

This it is, whether our trials have been,

1. Of a temporal nature—

[Temporal judgments, when heavy and of long continuance, are extremely afflictive[a]———And the removal of them, whether they have been public or private, social or personal, is a just ground for joy and thanksgiving. In such dispensations of mercy we may often behold "wonderful" efforts of Divine goodness: and our acknowledgments should be devout and fervent, in proportion to the occasion that calls them forth. As "the very land," and "the beasts of the field," were here called upon to rejoice, no less than "the children of Zion[b]," in the mercies vouchsafed unto them, so should we call forth "all that is within us to bless God's holy name" for the blessings which we now commemorate———]

2. Of a spiritual nature—

[Spiritual judgments, though less generally felt, are infinitely more grievous, than those which affect only our present interests. Say, ye who have been bowed down under a sense of guilt, and the fears of final dereliction, Whether this be not a burthen too heavy for you to bear? How should you rejoice then, and bless your God, if he has removed it from you! Surely God "has dealt wondrously with you." In providing such means for your restoration to his favour; (the death of his own Son, and the influences of his Spirit;) and in overcoming the reluctance of your hearts, and inclining you to embrace his proffered mercy; say, is not this wonderful? May you not behold wonders in every step of your way? Truly then there should be no bounds to your gratitude and love. The frame of your mind should be like that of the pious Hezekiah, "The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the fathers to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore

[a] Here the unprecedented distresses of the past year (1816—1817) were spoken of: and any other calamities that may hereafter occur may be mentioned.

[b] ver. 21—23.

fore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the House of the Lord[c]."]

The removal of his judgments from us is also a call from God,

II. For more entire affiance—

Whilst we are under the pressure of our afflictions, we are ready to think that it is in vain to call upon God. But God assures us that it is not: he tells us that "his people," namely, "those who wait upon him," shall never be ashamed[cc]. They may assuredly expect from him all that they stand in need of. They shall never want,

1. The gifts of his providence—

[This is abundantly declared in the Holy Scriptures. "They that fear the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good." There may be want to the lions; but there shall be none to them[d]. "Those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, shall have a due supply of all needful things added unto them."

The extent to which these promises are fulfilled is little understood by those who have much of this world's goods: but by the godly man who subsists by his daily labour, it is known and felt. He sees often in his small pittance such "wondrous dealings," as fill him with utter astonishment, and constrain him to cry out as Israel after the passage of the Red Sea, "Who is a God like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[e]."]

2. The blessings of his grace—

[Where shall we find one contrite sinner whom God ever refused to hear? Never was there one, from the foundation of the world. "Never did God say to any, Seek ye my face in vain." Not even a Manasseh, who had filled the streets of Jerusalem with the blood of innocents, was rejected, when once he humbled himself before his God. And our blessed Lord has said without any exception whatever, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" and it shall prove sufficient for our necessities, even though our trials and difficulties be multiplied above the sands upon the sea-shore. The Christian's hope is firm, and "shall never make him ashamed:" for God has said, that "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: he shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end[f]."

This

[c] Isai. xxxviii. 19, 20.
[cc] Compare Isai. xlix. 23. with the text.
[d] Ps. xxxiv. 9, 10.
[e] Exod. xv. 11.
[f] Isai. xlv. 17.

This is *repeated* with yet greater emphasis in the verse following my text, in that it is associated with an assurance that his people shall be made sensible of his presence with them, and his relation to them as their God for ever and ever. This is the heritage of all who believe in Christ[g], and make him the one foundation of all their hopes[h].]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are under any trouble—

[Whatever be your trouble, give not way to despondency; but betake yourselves to the remedy which God has prescribed, even that of "turning to him with weeping and with mourning and with fasting[i]." Were it a mere peradventure that God would hear you after a long trial of your faith and patience, it would be quite sufficient encouragement to call upon him[k]. But his return to you in a way of mercy is *sure*, if only you seek him in a way of penitential sorrow: for he will be "the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel." Only pour out your complaints into his bosom, and your prayer shall not go forth in vain. He will give you to eat of the bread of life and be satisfied, and turn all your sorrows into joy[m].]

2. To those who have experienced any great deliverance—

[Be not unmindful of your great Deliverer, but praise and magnify him with your whole hearts[n]——— Learn also to confide in him. Fresh troubles may arise, even heavier than you have ever yet experienced: but there is the same gracious God for you to go unto; and he will hear and answer you, as in the days of old. Nor is it to this world only that he will confine the tokens of his love: he will bear you, as on eagles' wings, throughout all this dreary wilderness; and finally put you into the full and everlasting fruition of the Promised Land, where neither want nor pain shall be any more experienced to all eternity.]

[g] Rom. ix. 33. & x. 11. [h] 1 Pet. ii. 6. [i] ver. 12.
[k] ver. 14. [l] Ch. iii. 16. [m] Isai. lxi. 3.
[n] Isai. xii. 4—6.

DCXVII.

THE MILLENNIUM.

Joel iii. 18. *It shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters; and a fountain shall come forth of the House of the Lord, and shall water the Valley of Shittim.*

THE return of the Jews to their own land at some future

future period seems to be predicted so plainly and so frequently, that no reasonable doubt can be entertained respecting it. As for their future conversion to the faith of Christ, that is absolutely certain. But previous to their final settlement in their own land, there will be a violent contest with them in Palestine: but their enemies will be defeated with great slaughter: and after that will the long-wished-for period arrive, when all, both Jews and Gentiles, shall turn unto the Lord, and all "become one fold, under one Shepherd."

Had the metaphorical expressions "of the mountains dropping with new wine, and the hills flowing with milk" been used alone, we might have supposed that the prediction related only to temporal prosperity, and the restoration of Canaan to that measure of fertility which it possessed in the days of old: but "the fountain coming forth from the House of the Lord" must have a spiritual import; and consequently the whole passage must be understood as designating and describing the millennial period.

From this sublime passage we shall take occasion to consider,

I. The blessings of that day—

The terms under which these blessings are set forth, will lead us to notice,

1. Their richness and variety—

[There are no terms whatever that can give us a sublimer idea of the Gospel than these: its blessings are here represented as most reviving and comforting, most salubrious and nutritious, suited to every age, and every condition of the human race.

Let us contemplate them a moment. *Reconciliation with God* through the blood of the cross, is the first that obtrudes itself upon our notice: and oh! who can tell how refreshing this is to a weary heavy-laden soul? With this, *peace* is introduced *into the conscience*, even that "peace of God which passeth all understanding." Friendship being thus cemented between God and man, the person who was till lately an enemy to his God, and an object of his everlasting indignation, is now adopted into his family, and enabled to look up with *a spirit of adoption*, crying Abba, Father! To the Lord Jesus *Christ* he now looks as his Friend and *his Beloved*; and to *the Father* he draws nigh with confidence, saying "O God, *thou art my God!*" Now he has

access

access to God at all times, with a liberty to pour out his heart before him, and an assurance that "whatever he shall ask shall be done unto him." Now also he enjoys an *union with the Lord Jesus Christ*, even such an union, as a branch has with the vine, or a member with the head: and, by means of that union, he receives constant communications from the fulness that has been treasured up for him in that living Fountain of all good. *The Holy Spirit* is now poured out upon him *as a Comforter*, and is imparted *in all his sanctifying operations*, to mortify all his corruptions, and to transform him into the Divine image. *Assured prospects of glory* are now opened to him, so that he has both the *earnest and foretaste of his heavenly inheritance*. But where shall we end, if we attempt to enumerate one hundreth part of the blessings which the Gospel makes over to us, and which are here characterized as "hills flowing with milk, and mountains dropping down new wine?" Suffice it to say, that all the blessings of the everlasting Covenant, all that Christ has purchased by his blood, and all that are made over to us in the exceeding great and precious promises, all are ours, if we are Christ's[a]———But to declare fully their richness and variety exceeds the powers of any finite intelligence.]

2. Their universality and abundance—

[These blessings will not then be so limited as they now are, either in the measure of their communication, or the objects on whom they are bestowed: they will "flow" in all the abundance of the most majestic "rivers," and that even "to the Valley of Shittim;" which being situated on the borders of Moab, and the shores of the Dead Sea, may well be considered as characterizing the most distant and barren places of the earth. There shall not be a human Being to whom its blessings do not extend: for "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." The high and the low, the rich and the poor, shall equally be partakers of them; for "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." "Kings will be the nursing-fathers of the Church, and Queens her nursing-mothers:" and with "the lofty firs and pines shall be united the humble box, to glorify the House of God's glory, and to make the place of his feet glorious[aa]." So universal shall be the reign of Christ on earth, that "holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses" which the peasants use in agriculture: the smallest vessel in the sanctuary shall be as highly sanctified as the largest; and "there shall no more be the Canaanite in the House of the Lord of Hosts[b]," "All in that day will be righteous;" and so righteous as to need no addition to their happiness from any

[a] The blessings here enumerated should not be treated distinctly and separately, but *collectively*; and *at the close of them*, a few observations should be made on their richness and variety.

[aa] Isai. lx. 13. [b] Zech. xiv. 20, 21.

any creature-comforts: "The sun shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and their God their glory [c]." It is not in respect of universality only that "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea," but of depth also; for "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound [d]."

O glorious period! "May the Lord hasten it, in His time!"]

Whilst we behold such a period predicted, it becomes us to consider,

II. Our duty in the prospect of it—

This is doubtless,

1. To help it forward by all possible means—

[God works by means: and, however fixed the times and the seasons may be in the Divine mind, it is by the use of means that he will accomplish these most glorious events. The first advent of Christ was proclaimed by his Forerunner, John the Baptist, who by his ministrations "made ready a people prepared for the Lord." And we in like manner are to act as heralds and harbingers of the Messiah's second advent. As pioneers, we are to prepare his way. By us must his path be levelled, to facilitate his march: we must go before him, to "prepare his way, to make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Through the instrumentality of men "shall every valley be exalted, and every mountain and hill be made low; and the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the Lord be revealed, and all flesh see it together:" yes, "by a voice crying in the wilderness shall all this be done: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it [e]."

Is it asked then, What shall we do to advance this glorious work? I answer, God has already gone out before us, and shewn us what to do. The Societies which, by his gracious providence, have already been established, shew in what line we may direct our efforts to the best advantage. The Bible is now translating into the different languages of men, and circulating to the ends of the earth: *that* is obviously the first and most important method of diffusing the knowledge of salvation through the world. Mission Societies also are in full activity, sending forth pious men to preach the everlasting Gospel, and to explain to the benighted nations of the earth the glorious mysteries which are there revealed. At last, too, attention begins to be paid to that "people,

[c] Isai. lx. 19—22.
[d] Isai. xxx. 26.
[e] Isai. xl. 3—5. with lxii. 10—12.

"people, wonderful from their beginning hitherto," the lost sheep of the House of Israel. They are the people spoken of more especially by the prophet, in the preceding context; and they are the people whom God will make use of for the bringing in the period described in our text: "the fulness of the Jews will be the riches of the world;" and "the receiving of the Jews will be to the whole world as life from the dead[f]." To aid these Societies therefore, and to unite our efforts with them, and especially by prayer to bring down the Divine blessing upon them, is the most effectual way we can take to accelerate the arrival of that glorious day. And, if we should not live to see the Temple raised ourselves, we shall at least have the satisfaction of having provided materials for it, and contributed towards it to the utmost of our power.]

2. To seek the foretaste of it in our own souls—

[All these blessings are to be enjoyed now, as well as at the period before referred to. They are all promised to us under the very same images. "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the *waters*, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy *wine* and *milk*, without money, and without price[g]!" This invitation is given to all without exception: "Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely[h]." Nor is it in small measure only that these blessings may be now possessed: for our Divine Master says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow *rivers* of living water[i]." Let those who desire these blessings be in as unfavourable a state as "the Vale of Shittim," they have no need to be discouraged on that account: for "God will open for them rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: he will make the wilderness a pool of water, and dry land springs of water[k]." What hinders then, but that we should partake of all those mercies ourselves? If we really believe, as all profess to do, that the enjoyment of them will exalt men so highly in the latter ages of the world, and bring down, as it were, a heaven upon earth, surely we should now aspire after a foretaste of that heavenly feast; and "not give rest unto our God[l]," till he "bring us to his banqueting-house, and till his banner over us be love[m]." To entertain an idea of the Millennium being a state of inconceivable felicity, and not to seek those graces and consolations which constitute its happiness, is a grievous inconsistency. Let all then be consistent: and now take their portion at that glorious feast which is spread for them in the Gospel, even "the feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined[n]"———]

ADDRESS,

[f] Rom. xi. 12, 15. [g] Isai. lv. 1. [h] Rev. xxii. 17.
[i] John vii. 37, 38. [k] Isai. xli. 17, 18. [l] Isai. lxii. 1, 7.
[m] Cant. ii. 4. [n] Isai. xxv. 6. The particulars of pardon, peace, &c. may be here again touched upon.

ADDRESS,

1. To those who think of religion as a source of melancholy—

[Does it wear that aspect in the passage before us? or can language be found to depict it in more lovely colours? Verily, if the transformation of a wilderness into the garden of the Lord be a joyful change, then is religion a source of unmingled joy and blessedness. But it may be said, that repentance and mortification of sin are painful works. True; but whence do they proceed? not from religion, but from sin, which must be repented of, and must be mortified. We are diseased, and must be cured, before we can enjoy health in our souls. If we were diseased in body, and needed a painful course of medicine, or the amputation of a limb, would any one ascribe our pains to health? Health would supersede the necessity of such a process: and when the soul is brought to the enjoyment of God's presence, and the possession of his image, it shall "have beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"———Let this erroneous notion then be put away; and let religion be regarded in its true light, as an anticipation and foretaste of the heavenly bliss.]

2. To those who profess to regard religion as a source of joy—

[You are correct in your sentiments on this momentous subject; but you must remember, that religion is a source of joy to those only who live nigh to God, and devote themselves unreservedly to his service. To those who give to God only a divided heart, it can administer no solid comfort. Indeed they are less happy than the ignorant ungodly world; for, whilst their profession keeps them from enjoying the vanities of the world, their distance from God prevents them from having any delight in him: so that there is nothing but an aching void, or a corroding anguish, in their hearts. O ye professors of godliness, either follow not the Lord at all, or "follow him fully." Live nigh to him, and walk with him, as Enoch did, and you shall never be disappointed of your hope: you shall never find that "he is a wilderness to you;" but you shall have the light of his countenance lifted up upon you, and "your mouth shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst you are praising him with joyful lips."

But we trust that many do really experience all the blessedness of true piety: and *they* will need no exhortation to diffuse the blessings which they themselves enjoy. The wine and milk which they find so nutritious and comforting to their own souls, they will gladly impart to others. Combine then, Brethren, your energies for that purpose. The whole world, except a small inclosure,

inclosure, is at this hour a wilderness. The Jewish people, with all their advantages, have reduced themselves almost to a level with the Gentile world: for whilst the Gentiles are "without God," the Jews are "without Christ, and therefore without hope," of ultimate acceptance before God. They believe not that Jesus is their Messiah; and therefore, as Jesus has said, "they die in their sins." Oh! rise ye as one man, and hold out to them the cup of salvation; and labour by all possible means to lead them to the "living Fountain of waters," that they may drink thereof, and live for ever.]

DCXVIII.

GOD'S COMPLAINT AGAINST US.

Amos ii. 13. *Behold, I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves.*

THE effect of long-continued provocations is to weary out our patience. Some few occasional offences we can easily forgive: but when they are repeated from time to time, they gall the mind, and produce considerable irritation, and stir us up, either by word or deed, to avenge ourselves. Something of this kind is represented as passing in the mind of God. We must not indeed conceive of him as if he had the same passions with ourselves; but yet he will so suit his dispensations to our conduct, that they shall bear the stamp of retributive justice, and accord, in a measure, with what is produced in the world by human passions. Hence he speaks of himself after the manner of men, in order to accommodate himself to our weak and carnal apprehensions: and, having told his people how greatly their transgressions had been multiplied against him, he declares, as one whose patience was quite exhausted, that he was "pressed under them, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves."

Let us consider,

I. What reason God has for this complaint against us—

We need not enter minutely into the particular accusations brought against the Israelites of old: in a general

a general view, they may be reduced to three; which may with equal justice be laid to our charge:

1. Our disregard of his laws—

[God had given his people laws, which they violated without remorse[a]. And has he not prescribed the moral law as the rule of our conduct? and is it not in all respects "holy, and just, and good?" Yet how have we obeyed it? Have we studied it with a view to find out the will of God? Have we been restrained and regulated by it as far as we knew it? Have we not, on the contrary, transgressed it in ten thousand instances? Have we not been swayed by the consideration of our worldly honour and interest, more than by a regard to God's authority? Where our own will has stood in competition with God's, have we not been ready to say, like Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?"

Do we then suppose, that the Governor of the universe is indifferent about the observance of his laws? Or, if he be not, must he not be "fretted[b]," "grieved[c]," and "vexed[d]," with our rebellions, and even "broken with our whorish heart[e]?" Lot vexed his righteous soul from day to day, on account of what he saw and heard in Sodom[f]: and must not He, who is infinitely holy, and who sees all the iniquity in the world at one view, be overwhelmed, as it were, with grief and vexation at our iniquities? Surely the comparison in the text rather falls short of, than exceeds, the truth: for we have "drawn out iniquity as a cart-rope[g]," continually adding fresh materials, and protracting it, without intermission, to an unknown length; and therefore well may God complain, that "we have wearied him with our iniquities[h]," and that he is "pressed under us as an overloaded cart."]

2. Our unmindfulness of his mercies—

[God particularly specifies the mercies he had vouchsafed to Israel, which had only served to aggravate their guilt[i]. And what innumerable mercies has he conferred on us! How has he formed us in the womb, and made us perfect in all our members; when we might have been hideous monsters, that could not endure the light of day! How has he furnished us with rational faculties, when many of our fellow-creatures are ideots, yea, less rational than the beasts! Above all, how has he endued us with an immortal soul, capable of knowing, serving, and enjoying God to all eternity! How has he kept us through the helpless years of

[a] Compare ver. 6—8. with 2 Chron. xix. 6, 7. 1 Kin. xxi. 3, 4. Lev. xviii. 8, 15. Exod. xxii. 26.
[b] Ezek. xvi. 43. [c] Ps. lxxviii. 40. [d] Isai. lxiii. 10.
[e] Ezek. vi. 9. [f] 2 Pet. ii. 8.
[g] Isai. v. 18. with Bp. Lowth's note upon it.
[h] Isai. xliii. 24. [i] ver. 9—11.

of infancy, and brought us in safety to the present hour; while thousands have never lived to receive instruction, or been cut off in the midst of their iniquities! Yet in what manner have we requited him for all his mercies? Have we blessed and adored and magnified him for all his love? Have we endeavoured to improve our time and faculties in his service? Have not rather the multitude and continuance of his gifts been the occasion of our entirely forgetting the Donor?

Make this your own case. If you had a servant whom you were daily loading with benefits, and yet could never prevail upon him to testify the smallest sense of his obligations to you, would you not be wearied at last, and think it right to discard such a worthless wretch from your service? And do you imagine that your heavenly Benefactor is not grieved at your ingratitude? Hear how he complains of it; and judge for yourselves: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me: the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know; my people do not consider[k]." "What could have been done more for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes[l]?" Do these complaints argue no weariness on the part of God? Do they not manifest that he is "pressed under us beyond measure," and scarcely able to sustain any farther load? May we not soon expect him to say, "I am grieved with that generation; and swear in my wrath, that they shall never enter into my rest[m]?"]

3. Our contempt of his blessed Gospel—

[The summit of Israel's wickedness was, that "they said to the Prophets, Prophesy not[n]." Now God has sent his Prophets to us, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, and to declare that all who believed in that Saviour should receive the Holy Spirit, as their Teacher, their Sanctifier, their Comforter[o]. But how have we received their message? Have we cordially embraced the Saviour? Are we seeking yet daily and hourly the influences of the Holy Spirit? Are not many of us rather ready to despise the Gospel, and to dispute against its truths as over-righteous fancies and enthusiastic dreams? Do not even those who profess to embrace the Gospel, shew by their lives how little they regard it in their hearts? And do not the very services which they present to God, provoke him to say, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them[p]?" Is not such a contempt of his Gospel most painful to him, and most destructive to us[pp]?

[k] Isai. i. 2, 3. [l] Isai. v. 4. [m] Ps. xcv. 10, 11.
[n] ver. 12. [o] Acts ii. 38, 39. [p] Isai. i. 14.
[pp] Matt. xxi. 37—41. Heb. ii. 3, and x. 28, 29.

See then the grounds of complaint which God has against us; and say whether the assiduity of harvestmen in loading their carts with the sheaves does not too much resemble us, who are thus incessantly loading God with our iniquities, till he can bear no more? Yea, we help and encourage each other in the work, as if we were afraid that we could not otherwise heap up upon him a sufficient load.]

The manner in which this complaint is made, calls us especially to consider,

II. What reason we have to be deeply concerned about our state—

Wherever we see in Scripture the word, "Behold," we may be sure that there is something worthy of our most solemn attention. And well may that word be prefixed to the declaration in the text, since an accumulating of such a load of guilt is a "treasuring up of a proportionable weight of wrath[q]." Let three things then be considered by all who are thus offending God:

1. God is able to vindicate the honour of his injured majesty—

[Survey the universe, and ask, Whether he who formed it out of nothing, be not able to avenge himself on such worms as we are? If that be not sufficient, cast an eye into the bottomless abyss of hell, and ask, "Who formed it? and, On what occasion? and, Who are the inhabitants of those dreary mansions? Or, if you choose rather to see what notices of his power and wrath you can find on earth, ask of the antediluvians, and they shall tell thee; or of the cities of the plain, and they shall warn thee; or of the Jews, that are scattered over the face of the whole earth, as living monuments of his indignation. As God said to his people of old, "Go to my place, which was in Shiloh, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel[r];" so would I refer you to all these instances, that you may know what a God "you have to do with;" and that "him who walketh in pride he is able to abase[rr]." If any doubt yet remain upon your mind, go and provide an answer to that question which Job put to his contentious friends; "God is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; Who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered[s]."]

2. As he is able, so is he determined, to avenge himself—

[God

[q] Rom. ii. 5. [r] Jer. vii. 12. [rr] Dan. iv. 37. [s] Job ix. 4.

[God has warned us plainly, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God[t]." But this is not all. He is like a man bearing with indignities for a time, under a pleasing expectation, that the vengeance which he shall shortly execute upon his enemy shall be signal and complete. See with what firm determination he prepares himself for his vindictive work, "whetting his sword, bending his bow, and making ready the instruments of death[u];" and *swearing most solemnly by his own life and perfections*, that "as soon as he has whet his sword, he will render vengeance to his enemies, making his arrows drunk with their blood, and causing his sword to devour their flesh[x]." See with what pleasure he looks forward to that period, when, like a man who has thoroughly avenged himself, his wrath shall be pacified by the entire destruction of his foe! "I have set the point of my sword against them, that their heart may faint, and their ruins be multiplied: *Ah! it is made bright, it is wrapt up for the slaughter*[y]." "Mine anger shall soon be accomplished on them, and I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted[z]:" "So will I make my fury towards them to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from them, and I will be quiet, and be no more angry[a]." Farther, see what delight he expresses when the time for vengeance is arrived! "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies[b]:" "I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith[c]."

Should not such declarations as these appal us? Should they not convince us what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God?"]

3. The time for retribution is fast approaching—

[When the cart is already overladen with corn, the heaping of sheaves upon it must quickly cease. And when our God is already "pressed under us," so that he can scarcely sustain any further weight, we may be sure that "the measure of our iniquities is nearly full," and that the hour of vengeance draws nigh. Methinks, God is at this moment saying, in reference to us, "My Spirit shall not strive with them any more[d]." "To me belongeth vengeance and recompence: their foot shall slide in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste[e]." What a mercy it is that there is yet an hour's respite allowed us! How should we redeem the time! How should we avail ourselves of the present moment, to flee from the wrath to come! How should we tremble, lest the order should be already given, not to take us to the granary of heaven, but to cast us into the flames of hell!

"Behold"

[t] Ps. ix. 17.
[u] Ps. vii. 11—13.
[x] Deut. xxxii. 40—42.
[y] Ezek. xxi. 15—17.
[z] Ezek. v. 13.
[a] Ezek. xvi. 42.
[b] Isai. i. 24.
[c] Deut. xxxii. 35.
[d] Gen. vi. 3
[e] Deut. xxxii. 20

"Behold" then, Brethren! "behold," what a God you are offending, and in what danger you stand! One more sheaf perhaps may complete the load: and will you proceed to lay it on? O cease from your fatal work, and cry to your long-suffering God for mercy ere it be too late!]

INFER,

1. What a burthen ought sin to be to us!

[You have heard what a burthen it is to God; that he even groans under it, and is weary to bear it. And ought it not to be a burthen to us who have committed it? Ought not we to be "weary and heavy-laden" with a sense of it[f]? Ought we not to feel it as an insupportable burthen; "to be troubled for it; to be bowed down greatly, and to roar for the disquietness of our hearts[g]?" Turn then to God, ye people; "be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God[h];" "and put your mouths in the dust, if so be there may be hope[i]."]

2. What obligations do we owe to Jesus Christ!

[Jesus has borne the burthen of our sins, not only as our Creator and Governor, but as our Redeemer. Even in the former view, he has been "grieved at the hardness of our hearts[k]," and has groaned over us[l], and found his burthen almost insufferable[m]. But, in the latter view, O what has he sustained? the guilt of all the human race! the wrath of an avenging God! Go listen to his cries and agonies in the garden of Gethsemane! See the blood issuing from every pore of his body! Trace him to Golgotha, and behold him expiring on the cross: ask, What was the cause? and you will find that he was sinking under the weight of your iniquities. And if *He* was thus overwhelmed with the load, what must become of *us*, if *we*, after all, should have to bear the curse due to our sins? Let every eye be fixed on him with humble, grateful adoration. Let every one look to his vicarious sacrifice for pardon and peace. And, as he has thus graciously "borne our sins in his own body on the tree," let us trust in him. Let us "go to him weary and heavy-laden, and we shall find eternal rest to our souls."]

[f] Matt. xi. 28. [g] Ps. xxxviii. 4—8. [h] Jam. iv. 9, 10.
[i] Lam. iii. 29. [k] Mark iii. 5. [l] John xi. 38.
[m] Mark ix. 19.

DCXIX.

INCORRIGIBLENESS REPROVED.

Amos iv. 11, 12. *Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because*

because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

THE various dispensations of providence are intended to awaken our concern for our best interests, and to bring us back to God. But the generality of mankind, satisfied with tracing events to second causes, neglect to make the improvement of them which God designs. Judgments and mercies in constant succession pass unheeded; and, instead of promoting our spiritual welfare, too frequently enhance rather our eternal condemnation. It is certain that God notices the effects which his dealings produce upon us: and, if we continue incorrigible under all the means which he uses for our good, he will sooner or later call us to a severe account. To this effect he speaks in the passage before us; where, having recapitulated the various methods by which he had sought to reclaim his people, he complains, after each; that "they had not returned unto him;" and, then he bids them prepare to answer for it at his tribunal.

We may with too much reason accommodate to ourselves the words originally addressed to Israel, and consider from them,

I. The complaint alleged against us—

God has used various means to bring us to repentance—

[In the context he specifies several judgments which he had inflicted on his people Israel, intimating, at the same time, that in the midst of judgment he had remembered mercy. His judgments had been successive, and partial; not universal, or all together. We too must confess that he has visited us with heavy calamities[a]——— But yet "he has stayed his rough wind in the day of his east wind," insomuch that we have been like "a brand plucked out of the fire!" War, famine, and pestilence have raged in different parts of the continent; but we, though slightly affected by them all, have escaped without any material injury[b].]

But in the midst of all we have continued impenitent—

[We

[a] Here may be mentioned any that have recently happened; especially if among them can be enumerated scarcity, or drought, or mildew, or pestilence, or prejudicial lightnings.

[b] Written Feb. 1805.

[We can see nothing of *national* reformation. Fasts indeed have been renewed from time to time: but it will be well if these be not numbered amongst our greatest sins; seeing that they have been little else than an empty form, a hypocritical service, a solemn mockery. As for national repentance, What evidence can be adduced to warrant the hope, that it has ever taken place? What national sin has been put away? Have we less pride and arrogance, when speaking of our fleets and armies? Have we ceased from traffic in human blood? Does not the land groan as much as ever under the load of sabbaths wasted, oaths violated, and sacraments profaned?

Nor can we boast much more of *personal* improvement. Are not the young as gay and dissipated, as if they had no occasion for mourning and weeping? Are not the worldly as intent upon their gains as if this world were their all? Do not the formal still continue as regardless of the life and power of godliness, as if the service of the heart were not required? Is there any considerable change even in the people of God? Is there much of a spirit of prayer and intercession found among them? Are they pleading, like Abraham for Sodom, or Moses for the worshippers of the golden calf? In truth, there are few, if any, who lay to heart the iniquities of the nation, or inquire, "What have *I* done" to increase the sum of our national guilt?]

Surely then, since we must plead guilty to the charge, we may fitly also apply to ourselves,

II. The admonition founded upon it—

God threatened the utter extinction of the Jewish nation[c]: and he bids *us* also to "prepare to meet him,"

1. In increased calamities—

[What God has already inflicted on us, is nothing in comparison of what we may expect at his hands, if we continue to provoke him. "Go to Shiloh, and see what he did to it for the wickedness of his people Israel[d]." Look at the Jews at this day, whom he has dealt with "as a man who wipeth a dish, and turneth it upside down[e]." He hath only smitten us with rods at present; but, if we repent not, he will "chastise us with scorpions:" yea, he will continue to "punish us seven times more for our sins." O that we might cease from our wickedness, before we oblige him to "come forth against us as a man of war," and "his fury burn to the lowest hell." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."]

2. In the day of future retribution—

[In

[c] ver. 2, 3. It is in reference to this that God says in the text, "*Thus* will I do."

[d] Jer. vii. 12. [e] 2 Kin. xxi. 12, 13. with 1 Kin. xiv. 10.

[In this world God calls men into judgment in their national capacity. It is in the eternal world only that he will reward and punish the different individuals. Then all of us must appear before his judgment-seat. And if we die impenitent, every dispensation which God had appointed for our good, shall be brought forth to aggravate our guilt and condemnation. "I sent you affliction; yet you returned not unto me: I sent you mercies; yet you returned not unto me: I gave you my Gospel to enlighten your mind, and my Spirit to affect your heart; yet you returned not unto me: I continued these mercies to you for so many years; yet you returned not unto me." Alas! how unanswerable will be his accusations, how just his sentence, how terrible his award!

For this account we must prepare: we must be ready to meet him whensoever he shall summon us: and if he call us unprepared, it were better for us that we had never been born.]

There are yet two or three CONSIDERATIONS, which we would impress upon your minds, to strengthen those which have been already proposed:

1. If you return not to God, there is no hope for you—

[From one end of the Bible to the other, we cannot find one word which countenances the idea of any person being saved, who dies impenitent. And should not this thought lead us to repentance? O let it have due influence on our minds! and let us be sufficiently on our guard against self-deception. Let us remember, that it is not a sigh, a tear, an acknowledgment, that will suffice: we must return unto God; we must return to him with our whole hearts: we must return in deep contrition, in lively faith, in unreserved obedience.]

2. If you return to God, you will find him ever ready to receive you—

[As, on the one hand, no one ever found mercy without repentance, so neither, on the other hand, was any true penitent ever rejected. Search the Scriptures; not a syllable will be found to discourage a sinner's return to God. Nations have always found mercy when they sought it earnestly; and of individuals, not one was ever rejected who turned unto God in sincerity and truth. What greater encouragement then can any man desire? There is the word, yea the oath, of Jehovah pledged, that none shall seek his face in vain. Beloved Brethren, only seek him with your whole hearts, and he will assuredly be found of you.]

3. Inconceivable will be the difference between those who are prepared to meet their God, and those who meet him unprepared—

[Think

[Think of an impenitent sinner, when summoned into the presence of his God: how glad would he be that the rocks should fall upon him, and the hills should cover him from his sight! But this cannot be. He must appear; he must answer for himself; he must receive his doom; he must take his portion "in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." View, on the contrary, the true penitent, the humble Believer: behold him coming forth with joy to meet his reconciled God and Saviour: he stands before his tribunal with unshaken confidence: "he knows in Whom he has believed." While the other anticipates in the frowns of his Judge the miseries of hell, he receives in Emmanuel's smiles, an earnest and foretaste of the heavenly felicity. This alone is sufficient to shew the importance of being prepared. We need not follow them to their different abodes: their comparative happiness at the first meeting of their God is abundantly sufficient to enforce this exhortation upon all, "Return unto the Lord, from whom ye have deeply revolted!"]

DCXX.

CONVERSION OF THE JEWS AND GENTILES.

Amos ix. 11, 12. *In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord, that doeth this.*

PROPHECIES are of necessity involved in some measure of obscurity; so that the full extent of their meaning cannot be seen at first, nor the precise period for their accomplishment ascertained. To many of them is affixed an apparently determinate, but really indeterminate, date; "*In that day.*" The expression, "*In that day,*" always refers to some signally important time, but not always to the same time: it sometimes refers to one advent of our Lord, and sometimes to another; so that we cannot determine, except by the passage itself, whether it relate to his coming in the flesh, or his coming to destroy Jerusalem, or his coming to reign in the Millennium, or his coming to judge the world. The context however will generally enable us to fix the period intended, if it relate only to one; or to specify the different seasons, if its reference be more extensive. It is with these words

words that the prophecy before us is introduced: and in it, the diversity of their meaning will appear.

Let us consider,

I. The import of the prophecy—

It evidently has different seasons of accomplishment. It speaks of,

1. The return of the Jews from Babylon—

[All the prophets who lived before that event, spake of it to some it afforded very ample scope for the minutest predictions. By their captivity in Babylon, the Jews were reduced to the lowest state of degradation: their polity, both civil and religious, was destroyed; and there were no remains of that grandeur to which they had been elevated in the days of David. But, on their return from Babylon, things were restored, *in a measure*, "as in the days of old;" and their inveterate enemies of Edom became subject to them[a]. This however is certainly only a subordinate sense of this prophecy; for it refers much more strongly to,]

2. The conversion of the Gentiles—

[When we speak of David's kingdom as typical of the Messiah's; and his enemies, of the Messiah's enemies; we perhaps may be thought to lean rather to the side of fancy than of judgment. But fancy should find no scope for exercise in interpreting the word of God: truth, and truth alone, should be the object of our research. The propriety of such representations is strongly marked by an inspired writer; who, *when determining a controversy of the utmost importance to the Jews*, adduces this very passage against them, to shew, that God had, many ages before, decreed the reception of the Gentiles into his Church, without subjecting them to the right of circumcision: and if that Apostle had imposed a sense upon the passage foreign to its real and received meaning, the Jews would doubtless have objected to his interpretation of it[b]. Here then we have one sense at least, (and *that* the most doubtful one,) of this important passage, fixed by undisputed and infallible authority. That in this sense it was accomplished, is too plain to stand in need either of proof or illustration: we ourselves, as of Gentile extraction, are living monuments of its truth.]

3. The future restoration of the Jews, and their union with the Gentiles in one universal Church—

[Though myriads of Gentiles have been converted to Christianity, we are far enough from having seen "*all* the heathen" subjected to the yoke of Christ; yet it is of *all* the remnant of the unconverted heathen that the prophet speaks. Nor have the Jews

[a] Obad. ver. 18—21. [b] Acts xv. 13—17.

Jews been so brought back to their own land as to be driven from it no more: yet it is to *such* a restoration of them that the prophet refers[c]. Both of these events will take place together, or in the nearest connexion with each other: "the fall of the Jews has been the riches of the Gentiles," and the fulness of the Gentiles will be as renewed life to the Jews[d]: then will both be united under one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ; and he, as the true David, will reign over them for ever[e]. All his enemies then, whether Jewish or heathen, will be put under his feet; and all the kingdoms of the world become his undisputed possession.]

Nor is this a speculative subject merely, but one replete with comfort: this will appear, by considering,

II. The encouragement to be derived from it—

Every prophecy admits of practical improvement; and this especially. It affords us rich encouragement,

1. In relation to individuals—

[The state of multitudes is altogether as desperate as was that of the Jews in Babylon. What hope is there of the proud infidel—the abandoned sensualist—the cruel persecutor—the hardened backslider[f]?—We should be ready to say concerning them, "There is no hope:" but there is nothing impossible with God; and he who restored the Jews from Babylon, and converted so many Gentiles by the instrumentality of a few poor fishermen, can at any time reclaim the Prodigal, convert a Saul, or restore a David———Let none then despair of themselves, as though they were beyond the reach of mercy; nor of others, as though God could not subdue them to the obedience of faith. Though they are "dry bones, very dry, the Spirit may yet enter into them, and they may live[g]."]

2. In relation to the world at large—

[Who that sees the state of the world at this moment, would conceive it possible that truth and righteousness should one day universally prevail? Yet God has ordained that the little grain of mustard seed which has sprung up, shall become a tree that shall extend its shadow over the whole earth———If we look at the work indeed, we shall sit down in despair: but if we recollect who it is that says, "I, I will do it," we shall see not only the possibility, but the certainty, of that event. Many, from not adverting to this, laugh at the idea of Missions: and many whom God has fitted for Missionary labours, are afraid to engage in them. But "is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" and has he not "ordained strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings?"

[c] ver. 14, 15. [d] Rom. xi. 12, 15, 31. [e] Jer. xxx. 9. Zech. xiv. 9.
[f] Shew in each of these states how desperate their condition is.
[g] Ezek. xxxvii. 1—14.

ings?" Has he not said too, "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this?" Let us then look with pity both on Jews and Heathens; and, in humble hope that the time of God's effectual interposition is fast approaching, let us labour, according to our ability, to extend the kingdom of our Lord, and to advance his glory.]

DCXXI.

THE MILLENNIAL STATE.

Amos ix. 13. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.*

IT is gratifying to see what a harmony there is in all the Prophets, in their descriptions of the glory of the Latter Day. The representations which Heathen Poets have given of what they call the Golden Age, are more than realized in the predictions. They appear indeed to speak of earthly things; but it is of heavenly things that they speak: and by earthly images they embody truth, and present it to our minds with incomparably greater force than it could by any other means be conveyed. The idea of fertility, for instance, in all its richest luxuriance, is calculated to make a strong impression on the imagination: it is tangible, as it were; and we can apprehend it; and, when it is set before us in glowing language, we can with ease transfer to spiritual things our perceptions with all their clearness, and our impressions with all their force. Most striking is the picture drawn by the prophet Hosea. He represents the people uttering their complaints to the corn and wine and oil; and they to the earth; and the earth to the heavens; and the heavens to Jehovah: and all of them in succession conceding to the other the blessings solicited at their hands; Jehovah granting clouds to the heavens; they pouring out their contents upon the earth; the earth yielding its juices to the corn and wine and oil; and they nourishing the famished people[a]. The prophet Joel goes further, and describes the effects produced, the mountains dropping down new

[a] Hos. ii. 21—23.

new wine, and the hills flowing with milk[b]: whilst the prophet Amos proceeds yet further, and represents the productions of the earth as so abundant, that there will scarcely be time to gather them in; "the plowman overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth the seed:" in other words, that successive operations of husbandry will, by reason of the abundance, press so closely upon each other, as almost to interrupt the regular execution of them.

It is with the spiritual import of these images that we are more immediately concerned. It seems indeed highly probable, that, agreeably to the promise given by Moses[c], there will be, as nearly as possible, a literal accomplishment of these things in Palestine, after that the Jews shall have been brought back to their own land; (for that event shall certainly take place in the appointed time[d]:) but infinitely richer blessings await them in that day; for that period shall be distinguished by,

I. Frequent ordinances—

At the first establishment of the Christian Church, the people "continued daily in the Temple with one accord, and brake bread together from house to house, eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Thus also will it be in that blessed day, when Apostolic piety shall again prevail throughout the Church: there will be no "famine of the word," but frequent ordinances in every place:

[*In public*, Ministers will then "give themselves wholly to their work:" they will be "instant in season and out of season:" they will live only to fulfil their ministry, and will "count their lives dear to them" for no other end. The people too will be as eager to receive instruction, as the Ministers to convey it. As many followed our blessed Lord for days together to hear his word, and forgot, as it were, the very wants of nature through the insatiableness of their appetites for spiritual food; so, methinks, in that day the people will, as it were, "*dwell* in the House of the Lord, that they may flourish in the courts of our God."

Then also will *social* ordinances abound. Friends, when they meet

[b] Joel iii. 18. [c] Lev. xxvi. 5. [d] ver. 14, 15.

meet together, will then seek to edify each other in faith and love. In families, all will look for the returning seasons of divine worship, as much as for their regular meals. Parents will "command their children to fear the Lord;" and masters will universally adopt the resolution of Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

In private too men will delight in approaching to their God, and in pouring out their souls before the throne of Grace. "At morning, and at evening, and at noon-day will they pray," as David did in the times of old; yea, they will be ready to say with him, "Seven times a day will I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgments."

Thus in the public, social, and private ordinances there will be such a rapid succession, that the "plowman will overtake the reaper; and he that treadeth out the grapes, the sower." Not that temporal things will be neglected: men will "not be the more slothful in business, because they are fervent in spirit;" but they will carry the fear and love of God into every thing, so that they will "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." "The fire on their altar will never go out."]

From this state of things there will arise,

II. Numerous converts—

[*Now* Ministers may fish all the day, and take scarcely any thing; but *then* the Lord will direct them where and how to cast their nets; which they shall scarcely be able to drag to land, by reason of the numbers that they shall catch. The days of Pentecost shall be revived. From a small handful of corn shall spring up a crop waving like the trees of Lebanon, and standing as close upon the ground as piles of grass upon the earth[e]. Fresh converts shall be continually hastening forward, as "doves flying to their windows;" yea rather, they shall be like a majestic river "flowing together to the goodness of the Lord," and that too, not as in an ordinary course, but *upward*, "even to the Mountain of the Lord's House that shall be established on the top of the mountains[f]." The Church itself shall be perfectly astonished at the increase; which will be so vast and so rapid, that places shall be wanting for their reception[g]. In a word, "the fields will be always white ready to the harvest;" and one crop will not be gathered in, before another is ripe for the sickle."]

Nor will Christianity be a mere profession then; for all who embrace it shall be distinguished for,

III. Exalted virtues—

[All will then "live, not unto themselves, but unto their God;

[e] Ps. lxxii. 16. [f] Isai. ii. 2. [g] Isai. xlix. 18—23.

God; even to Him who died for them, and rose again." The fruit which individuals will then bear will not be thirty or sixty-fold, but an hundred-fold. It will appear as if all the most eminent saints that have ever lived had risen again; on which account it is called, "The first resurrection[h]." So subdued will be all the evil passions of men in that day, that "instead of the thorn will grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier will grow up the myrtle-tree[i]:" "for brass there will be gold; for iron, silver; for wood, brass; and for stones, iron[k]." It will be truly the reign of Christ upon earth: nothing but his will will be done; and it will be done on earth in good measure, as it is done in heaven. Godliness will then be, not an act, but a habit; so that one act of piety will be only as a prelude to another; "the very mountains dropping with sweet wine, and the hills melting" into rivers of wine.]

Resulting from this state of piety, there will be,

IV. Abundant consolations—

[This is doubtless intimated in our text, as in the parallel passage in the prophet Joel[l]. Truly "God will then comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord: joy and gladness will be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody[m]." The world at this time is only a vale of tears: but then "there will be new heavens and a new earth: yea, God will make all things new[n]." What will be the state of men's minds at that time, may be gathered from the description given of it by the prophet Isaiah[o]———Blessed and glorious state! "the peace of all will flow down as a river," and the joy of all be unspeakable and glorified[p]———"God will cause them universally and without ceasing to triumph in Christ[q];" and to live as on the very confines of heaven itself."]

IMPROVEMENT—Let us inquire,

1. Whence it is that *we* are comparatively in so low a state?

[It is manifest that religion, though perhaps flourishing in comparison of what it was a century ago, is still but at a low ebb. If we look at the ordinances, public, private, and social, they are far from being attended with that life and power that they were in the Apostolic age. And whence is this? Are we straitened in our God? No: "we are straitened in our own bowels:" we do not pant after the life and power of godliness, as the first converts did: and "we have not, because we ask not." O that

[h] Rev. xx. 5, 6. [i] Isai. lvi. 13. [k] Isai. lx. 17.
[l] Joel iii. 18. [m] Isai. li. 3. See also xxxv. 1, 2.
[n] Rev. xxi. 1, 5. [o] Isai. xii. 3—6. [p] Isai. xxxv. 6, 10.
[q] 2 Cor. ii. 14.

O that we were more earnest and constant in prayer, forgetting all that we have received, and pressing forward for higher attainments!———]

2. How we may attain a greater measure of that prosperity which the saints will enjoy in the latter day?

[We must all begin with our own hearts. If all would labour for higher attainments in their own souls, the whole Church of God would revive and flourish———But an attention to others also is most desirable. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt with incredible celerity, because all, women as well as men, "repaired before their own doors[r]:" and if we laboured, all of us in our own more immediate neighbourhood, what might we not effect! If only we "had a mind to the work," "the work of the Lord should prosper in our hands," and "the kingdom of Christ should come with power" in the midst of us.]

[r] Neh. iii. 10, 12, 23, 28, 29.

DCXXII.

BLESSED EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL IN THE LATTER DAYS.

Obad. 17. *Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness: and the House of Jacob shall possess their possessions.*

IT is curious to observe throughout the Prophetic Writings, that the richest promises relating to the Christian Church follow, and, I had almost said, arise out of, denunciations of vengeance against the enemies of God: the design of God being to display thereby, in a more abundant measure, the riches of his grace towards his chosen people. The great scope of Obadiah's prophecy is to warn the Edomites of the destruction that awaited them. But, regarding them as representing all the Church's enemies, by whatever name they are designated, he proceeds to declare, that the Church should triumph over them, and, through the power and grace of Christ, be established in the full enjoyment of all her privileges. The time to which he looks forward for the accomplishment of these things is the latter day, when the Jews shall be restored to their own land, and be, in their national capacity

capacity an emblem of the success that shall be given to the Christian Church throughout the world.

In elucidation of the prophecy, we shall consider,

I. The deliverance here spoken of—

It certainly, in its primary and literal sense, refers to the contest which shall take place, between the Jews at the time of their restoration, and their enemies who will oppose their settlement in the land of Canaan. But the spiritual sense is that which was most prominent in the writer's mind. The deliverance is certainly that which the Lord Jesus Christ had undertaken to accomplish for his Church and people[a].

This has already come to Zion—

[The Lord Jesus Christ has come according to all that was foretold concerning him; and has entered the lists against the enemies of his Church, and has triumphed over them. "By his death he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil:" and having spoiled Principalities and Powers, and triumphed over them openly upon the cross," he, in his ascension, "led captivity itself captive;" and has left his people to fight only with a vanquished enemy[b]. By his atoning blood he has delivered his people out of the hands of justice, which demanded the execution of the sentence denounced against them by the Law. Having "found, and offered, a ransom for them," he has authoritatively said, "Deliver them from going down into the pit" of hell. By his all-powerful grace, too, he has communicated this deliverance to thousands and tens of thousands, whom he has turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. To millions of prisoners he has said, Go forth, and shew yourselves; and they have broken their bonds, and come forth to light and liberty.]

It is also experienced yet daily—

[How many witnesses are there in this place, and wherever the Gospel is preached with fidelity, who can set their seal to this blessed truth! Many can say, I was once a slave to sin, and led captive by the devil at his will: but now "the Son of God has made me free; and I am free indeed:" he has brought my soul out of prison, and set my feet at liberty. Nor am I any more "in bondage to the fear of death" and judgment; for "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him"— — —]

But it will be yet more largely experienced in the latter days—

[Zion

[a] Compare Joel ii. 32. with Rom. x. 13. & xi. 26. [b] John xvi. 11.

[Zion shall then lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes; and all the nations of the earth shall flow unto her, as the centre of their union, and the treasury of their bliss. Then shall "Satan indeed fall from heaven like lightning:" then shall "the prince of this world be utterly cast out." Then shall Dagon fall before the ark in every quarter of the universe: and all the slaves of sin and Satan be brought "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." Then shall the jubilee trumpet sound in every place: "the preaching of deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," will then be accompanied with such power from on high, that it shall be to all, what the trumpet of the Archangel shall be in the day of judgment, an effectual call, "as life from the dead;" so that all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

With this deliverance will be seen,

II. Its never-failing attendant—

In no place under heaven, but in Zion, is holiness found. The semblance of it may be seen in many places; its reality nowhere. Let us understand what holiness is—

[It is not a conformity to external rights, nor a practice of mere heathen virtues; but a real conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. It is the image of God upon the soul; and an exhibition of it in the whole of our spirit and conduct. It is "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," and a "walking in all things as he walked"———]

This, from the time that deliverance is vouchsafed to Zion, shall be found there—

[It was the great design of our Deliverer to produce it in his Church: he "gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity:" and "he is called Jesus," not so much because he saves his people from destruction, as "because he saves his people from their sins." Holiness is the characteristic mark whereby the people whom he has delivered are to be distinguished: they are "purified unto Christ, a peculiar people zealous of good works." Whoever professes to have experienced his deliverance, without being truly and universally "righteous, even as Christ himself is righteous," is declared by God himself to be "a liar[c]." Believers are "his epistles" to the world, that they who will not look into the book of revelation, may see in them a living exhibition of his will. In every department of the divine life, the heavenliness of their minds, the sweetness of their spirit, and the blamelessness of their lives, they "shine as lights in a dark world:" the effulgence indeed is not equally

[c] 1 John ii. 4. & iii. 3, 6—10.

equally bright in all: there are stars of a greater, and of a lesser magnitude; but in all it is manifest, both from the uniformity and continuance of their splendor, that they are upheld in their orbits by the power of God, and irradiated with the beams of the Sun of righteousness: in a word, holiness is an essential part of the deliverance itself; and therefore must exist in every member of the Church of Christ. Deliverance, in this view, is most desirable: yet is its value greatly enhanced by,]

III. Its ultimate effect—

Here the reference to the restoration of the Jews, especially as connected with the destruction of all their enemies, is more marked: "The House of Jacob shall possess their possessions;" every tribe having the portion peculiarly allotted to them[d]. That they will vanquish all who oppose them, and finally be established in the quiet possession of their own land, is so plain, that it cannot reasonably admit a doubt[e]———But there is yet a higher sense in which the prophecy shall be fulfilled. The land of Canaan was typical of a far nobler inheritance, which all the House of Jacob shall possess.

Believers "do now enter into rest"—

[Our blessed Lord promised rest unto all who should come to him weary and heavy-laden with their sins: and this rest he now bestows: and the Canaan which the Israelites entered into, is but a shadow of it. That "land indeed flowed with milk and honey:" but who can tell what delicious repasts are provided for the soul that believes in Christ? Who but He who possesses "the white stone, can tell the name that is written on it[f]?" Who can adequately inform us what the peace of God is, or what "the joy of faith?" The one, we are told, passeth understanding; and the other is altogether unutterable. These, with a multitude of other blessings, are even now the Believer's portion; and he so enters into the possession of them, as to be able to defy all his enemies to rob him of the enjoyment of them[g]. It was not the power of their enemies, but the greatness of their sins, that expelled the Jewish people from their land: nor shall any enemy be able to prevail against us, if only we are faithful to ourselves. And, happily for us, that stability is insured to us by God himself, who "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it."]

But the full possession of it is reserved for another world—

[There

[d] v. 18—20. [e] See Jer. xxx. 3, 10, 18, 19. & xlvi. 27. Zech. xii. 6—9.
[f] Rev. ii. 17. [g] Rom. viii. 35—39.

[There is an inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world: and in due time they shall enjoy it in all its fulness. The Believer may now look forward to it with assured confidence. Here he is a minor only; and therefore, though the heir, he differs but little from a servant: he has so much of the inheritance as is suited to his condition, and sufficient for his necessities: but in the last day he will have the very same possession of his inheritance that Christ himself has: his vision of Jehovah will be most bright; his communion with him most intimate; his communications from him most abundant: and he will know that eternity itself will be the duration of his bliss. "He shall be a pillar in the Temple of his God, and shall go no more out."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who oppose the Church of God—

[As in their journey to the land of Canaan, the Edomites and other nations opposed the progress of the Children of Israel; and as in the latter days there will be a confederacy of many people to prevent their re-establishment in their former inheritance; so now at this time, and indeed in every age, the men of this world "have evil will at Zion," and exert themselves in every way to obstruct the progress of all who are going thitherward. But what success had their enemies against Israel of old? or what shall they have in the day spoken of in our text? Verily the strongest of them will be only "like sheep before a lion, who will go through, and tread them down, and tear in pieces; and none shall deliver them[h]." Thus shall it be with those who now oppose and persecute the Church of God. We say not that the people of God will be the instruments of God's vengeance; for *that* they cannot be, seeing that "the weapons of their warfare are not carnal:" but this we say, that "no weapon formed against God's people shall prosper;" and that all who seek their ruin shall be put to shame: they "fight against God:" they "kick against the pricks:" and in due time a suitable recompence shall be given them. God, when denouncing his judgments against Edom, reminds them of particular evils, which, however gratifying they were to their malignant spirits at the time, they should not have committed: thus also will he bring to the remembrance of his enemies all the evils they have committed, and especially the treatment they have shewn to his Church and people: and then they will find, that it would have been "better to have had a millstone tied round about their necks, and to have been cast into the sea, than to have offended one of his little ones." The Lord grant, that men may no longer make Christ a stone of stumbling, lest "it fall upon them, and crush them to powder!"]

2. Those

[h] Mic. v. 8.

2. Those who are looking for redemption in Jerusalem—

[It may be that some are discouraged, because they have not yet experienced deliverance to the extent they wish: they seem to themselves as if their long and willing captivity to sin and Satan precluded them from the hope of mercy: and they are ready to say with Israel of old, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered?" But our answer is, like that of the prophet, "Yes; thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children[i]." Be not afraid: though you are but as "a worm, yet shall you thresh the mountains[k]:" and the weaker you feel yourselves to be, the stronger in reality you are, because God has pledged himself to "perfect his own strength in your weakness." Expect then deliverance, with all its attendant benefits: and rest assured, that none shall pluck you out of the hands of your great Deliverer. God has sworn, that "he will plant you in the heavenly land, assuredly with his whole heart, and with his whole soul:" and "what he hath promised, he is able also to perform." "Faithful is He that hath called you; who also will do it."]

[i] Isai. xlix. 25, 26. [k] ib. xli. 14, 15.

DCXXIII.

JONAH REPROVED BY THE MARINERS.

Jonah i. 6. *So the shipmaster came to him, and said to him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.*

PERHAPS in all the Sacred Records there is not to be found a more strange and inconsistent character than the prophet Jonah. That he was *on the whole* a good man, we have every reason to believe: but his spirit was on many occasions so contrary to what we might have expected to find in a prophet of the Lord, that, if we did not know from our own hearts what is in man, we should not have conceived it possible that such contrarieties could be combined in the same character. The very first we hear of him is, that he so conducted himself as to bring upon himself a severe and just rebuke from a heathen mariner. Having received from God a commission to go

go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, and there to proclaim the indignation of God against them for their impieties, he fled to Joppa, and from thence took ship for Tarshish, hoping that he should thus avoid the necessity that was laid upon him of delivering a message so replete with pain to them, and of danger to himself. But the Lord sent a storm to arrest him in his impious course: and so violent was the storm, that all hope of saving the ship by human efforts was taken away, and no resource remained to the mariners but prayer to God. Whilst all the crew were crying to the gods which they worshipped, Jonah was indifferent and unconcerned, and had fallen fast asleep in the sides of the ship. In this situation he was when the shipmaster came to him, and administered the reproof which we have just heard.

Let us consider this reproof,

I. As addressed to Jonah—

The occasion of the reproof you have already heard in few words. But there are two things which call for more particular attention; namely,

1. The state of Jonah at that time—

[How can we account for his being so supine in the midst of such imminent danger? One would have supposed that he, a prophet of the Lord, would have improved that occasion for the benefit of the mariners, (as the Apostle Paul did afterwards, in similar circumstances,) and that he would have employed himself in directing the poor ignorant heathens to Jehovah, as the true and only source of all good: or if, from the low state of his piety at that time, we might conceive him to be indisposed for such an holy exercise; and that, when in an act of rebellion himself, he would be ill fitted for the office of calling others to repentance; we should at least expect him to be alarmed with a sense of his own guilt, and to be deprecating the Divine displeasure on his own soul. Yet, behold! of all the ship's company, he alone is unconcerned; and makes that, which was to all others a season of terror and dismay, an occasion for laying himself down quietly to sleep. That Peter was sleeping quietly on the night preceding his expected martyrdom, we do not wonder; because he was suffering for righteousness' sake, and knew that death would be to him the gate of heaven. But we do wonder that Jonah was able to close his eyes in sleep, when death was apparently so near

at

at hand; and he must know, that, if he died, he would be cut off in the very act of wilful transgression. But his insensibility at that time shews us, in a very striking manner, the true effect of sin; which hardens the heart, and stupifies the conscience; brutalizes the soul, and renders it indifferent to all that concerns its eternal welfare. St. Paul tells us this; "Take heed," says he, "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin[a]." He speaks also of our "conscience being seared by it, as with a hot iron;" and of our being made "past feeling." Thus it was with Jonah at this time: and all who are acquainted with their own hearts, will see that this stupidity of his was the proper effect of his wilful transgression. Repentance takes away the heart of stone, and substitutes a heart of flesh: and sin, in proportion as it is indulged, re-converts the heart of flesh to stone.]

2. The sentiments contained in the reproof—

[We are amazed to hear such sentiments proceed from the mouth of a heathen mariner: but we are convinced, that there are much stronger notices of truth remaining in the heart of fallen man, than is commonly supposed. There was not indeed in these people any distinct knowledge of Jehovah: but there was a belief in a superintending Providence, who ordered every thing according to his own sovereign will, and was able to interpose effectually in behalf of those who sought him; yea, moreover, that even though we sought him only in our extremity, there still was reason to hope that he would hear our cry, and vouchsafe to us the desired deliverance. What god the shipmaster had an eye to, we do not know: but supposing him, though under some mistaken name, to be looking to Jehovah, his views are precisely such as were avowed and inculcated by the prophet Joel, when he said, "Rend your heart, and turn unto the Lord your God: for who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him[b]?"

This we consider as encouraging to those who go forth to convert the heathen: we consider it as shewing, that, however obscured by superstition, there are in the minds of the most ignorant heathen some notices of truth, which, if duly improved by an instructor, will greatly facilitate the admission of other truths, which can be known only through the medium of a special revelation. The existence and attributes of a Supreme Being are here acknowledged; and the duty of his intelligent creatures to call upon him is also declared: and whoever diligently improves these more obvious truths, will, we doubt not, be gradually guided into all truth. But when we behold a prophet of the Lord, who should have been a teacher of others, himself thus reproved by a heathen mariner, we blush for him; and blush also for ourselves, well knowing, how much we ourselves need to have these

[a] Heb. iii. 13. [b] Joel ii. 13, 14.

these truths impressed more forcibly on our own minds, and how rarely they operate on us to the extent that they did on those uninstructed mariners.]

With these feelings it will be profitable to us to consider the reproof,

II. As applicable to ourselves—

We are not indeed altogether in the situation of Jonah; yet we approximate more nearly to it than may at first sight be imagined—

We are all in some degree sleeping in the midst of danger—

[God has given to us, as he did to Jonah, a work to do: and it is a work which we do not naturally affect: we are averse to engage in it: there are some considerations operating in our minds to deter us from it: we think it may expose us to difficulties, which we would gladly avoid; and subject us to troubles, which we care not to encounter. Hence we "flee from the presence of the Lord;" and are glad to go any where, and engage in any thing, that may afford us an excuse for our wilful neglect. In this state the curse of God follows us wherever we may go, his judgments hang over us, and "his wrath abides upon us." The children of disobedience, wherever they are, are objects of his heavy displeasure.

Yet, whilst under these circumstances, what is the state of our minds? Are we striving, like the mariners, to obtain mercy at his hands? Are we not rather, for the most part, like Jonah, sunk down into a deep sleep? Yes; this is the case with *the generality* altogether; with *the better part* of us, in great measure; and with *the best amongst* us, in some degree.

Behold the generality, how careless are they and indifferent, though on the brink and precipice of eternity!———Even the more considerate part have no such activity and earnestness as the occasion calls for——— And where is there one amongst us, who does not fluctuate in his zeal for God, and sometimes, like the wise virgins, give way to slumbering and sleeping, when we should be watching for the coming of our Lord?———]

To all then may the reproof in our text be well administered—

[What meanest thou then, O sleeper, whoever thou art? *Art thou not in danger?* Search the Sacred Records; and see, whether the wrath of God be not revealed against all the children of disobedience? What if thou be insensible of this danger? art thou therefore the more safe? Was Jonah's life the less in jeopardy because he was unconscious of his peril? Neither then is thy ruin a whit the less certain, because thou art not conscious of thine exposure to it.

Is

Is there any way for thine escape, but that of crying mightily to God for mercy? No other way is provided: all your own efforts will be as ineffectual as the mariner's labour was. Thou must betake thyself to prayer; for none but an omnipotent arm can save thee: there is no deliverance from thy guilt, but through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ; no acceptance with the Father, but through his beloved Son; no other name given under heaven whereby you can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.

Once more—*Is there not abundant encouragement to pray?* Look at the promises contained in Holy Writ: see how "exceeding great and precious they are;" and then say, Whether thou hast any reason to despond? Hadst thou but a peradventure in thy favour, it were a sufficient reason for all possible earnestness in prayer. *That* was all the hope which these mariners had. But *you* have the strongest assurances, of a "God that cannot lie," that you "shall not seek his face in vain," but that "whatsoever you shall ask in his Son's name shall be done for you."

What meanest thou then, O sleeper? What excuse canst thou offer for thine unreasonable conduct? Art thou dreaming of future opportunities to call upon God, when, for ought thou knowest, the ship may sink with thee the next instant, and thy soul may be plunged into the depths of hell? "Arise," I say, "and call upon thy God," and lose not another moment in a concern of such infinite importance.

In the mean time, use all the means thou canst for thyself. "Cast out all that thou hast" in the world, rather than suffer it to sink thee into perdition. If thou hadst all the wealth of the universe, it would but ill compensate for the loss of thy soul. Nor let it be thought that I speak to those only who are determined rebels against God: no: if there be a Jonah here; a professor of godliness, who is in a state of departure from his God, him I would more especially address. Know, thou unhappy fugitive, that God will not let thee pass unpunished: on the contrary, he will the rather follow thee with some tremendous storm, and send thee into the depths of hell (if I may so speak) in this world, to deliver thee from perdition in the world to come. "Awake then from thy slumber, that Christ may give thee light." Surely "it is high time for thee to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Professors, "let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch, and be sober." With the exception of the terror with which they were agitated, the state of the heathen mariners should be ours; nor should we cease from our pleadings, till we are brought in safety to our desired haven. We must not give occasion for that sarcastic reflection, "In trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them:" no: we must "pray without ceasing;" we must "pray and not faint:" and then we may be assured, that, whatever storms or difficulties we have to contend

contend with, "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Only let us think upon God, and God will most tenderly "think on us:" he will maintain towards us "thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give us an expected end."]

DCXXIV.

JONAH RESTORED FROM THE BELLY OF A FISH.

Jonah ii. 6. *Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.*

IT is of the highest importance to have seasons of recollection, for the more solemn investigation of the state of our souls. Not a day should be closed without serious reflections on our conduct through the day. On particular occasions it would be well to commit them to writing, with a view to our future humiliation or encouragement. Jonah's example in this respect is worthy of imitation. Having received from God a commission to denounce his judgments against Nineveh, and being afraid, that, after all, God would exercise mercy towards them, and make him appear a false prophet, he declined the office that had been assigned him, and endeavoured to "flee from the presence of the Lord." But a storm overtook him; and he was cast into the sea, and swallowed by a fish; and then, being preserved alive in that extraordinary situation, he thought on his ways, and cried unto his God for mercy. After his deliverance, he called to remembrance the exercises of his mind during his perilous confinement; and recorded them, for the benefit of the Church to the end of time. He tells us, that at first he began to despair; conceiving that "the Lord had cast him out of his sight." But, knowing that nothing was impossible with God, he directed his eyes towards heaven, and prayed. His prayer was heard, and the desired mercy was vouchsafed to him. This he acknowledges in the words before us: in which we have,

I. An instructive history—

Every part of this history is replete with instruction.

tion. Other parts of Holy Writ inform us of the frailties of God's people, and exhibit Noah, Lot, David, Peter, and others, in very humiliating conditions. But there is a peculiarity in the character of Jonah that distinguishes him from all others, and gives us a deep insight into the human heart. We cannot however stop to enter minutely into his character, or into the diversified lessons which his history would teach us. We shall confine ourselves to two observations, which are of a general nature and of universal importance:

1. Rebellion against God will surely bring upon us his heavy displeasure—

[Jonah might think lightly perhaps of the sin he had committed, when refusing to execute the commission he had received: and he certainly was unmindful of the danger he had brought upon himself, even while all who sailed with him in the ship were in the utmost terror. But God was visiting him for his iniquity; and, in order to the discovery of it, suggested to the minds of the mariners to ascertain, by a lot, who the guilty person was, for whose sake the storm was raised. The lot fell on Jonah: and he, being impeached thus by God himself, confessed his crime; and prescribed, as the only means of pacifying the Deity, that he himself should be cast into the sea. Thus did vengeance overtake him. And shall we sin with impunity? What though we think light of our sins, and sleep in security when we should be praying to our God; does God estimate sin by our standard? or is danger at all more remote, because we do not see it? Of this we may be assured, that "evil will hunt the wicked man, to overthrow him;" and, however long we may elude its pursuit, it will seize upon us at last, as its legitimate prey. The declaration of God to every impenitent person is, "Be sure your sin will find you out."]

2. Whatever effects of his displeasure we may now feel, the prayer of penitence and faith will deliver us from them—

[A more desperate condition than that of Jonah cannot well be conceived[a]. Yet from thence was he brought by the efficacy of fervent prayer[b]. Be it so then; we have sinned against the Lord in a very grievous manner; and we are at this moment under his chastising hand; still "Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" No: the Lord is merciful and gracious: and, if only we have a heart to

[a] See his description of it, ver. 2, 3, 5. [b] ver. 2, 4, 7.

to pray, we need not doubt but that he has an ear to hear. Were we at the bottom of the sea, yet if we were able to look unto his holy Temple, we should not look in vain. We might not be delivered with respect to the body; but the soul should find acceptance at God's hands, and be made a monument of his sparing mercy.]

We dwell the less on the historical view of Jonah's deliverance, because we wish you to notice it more particularly as,

II. A glorious type—

We are always cautious of exceeding the bounds of truth and soberness in the explanation of types. On this account we altogether omit, what some have laid a stress upon, the idea of Christ's offering up himself a sacrifice to God for the purpose of averting his wrath from us. And we should be inclined to limit the typical import of this history to the resurrection of Christ, if he himself had not given us a more extended view of it. But, in the place where he speaks of Jonas as being "a sign" to the people, he calls him "*the prophet* Jonas," and mentions the remarkable success of his ministrations[c]. We are induced therefore to consider the whole of this history as designating the ministry of Jesus;

1. In its temporary suspension—

[The casting of Jonah into the sea, and his being swallowed by a fish, effectually, as it should seem, put an end to his mission. Whatever gracious intentions God had formed respecting the Ninevites, they were now, to all appearance, frustrated; so that, unless God should send to them by some other prophet, his judgments would come upon them without warning, and without a remedy.

Such was also the distressful, and apparently irremediable, state, to which the world was reduced by the death of Christ. His enemies triumphed when they saw him dead upon the cross, and committed to the silent tomb. His friends and followers then concluded, that they had been mistaken in their expectations, and that the redemption of Israel which they had looked for at his hands was a hopeless phantom[d]. To guard them against this erroneous conclusion, our blessed Lord expressly told his Disciples, that "he should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."]

2. Its

[c] Matt. xii. 38—41. [d] Luke xxiv. 21.

2. Its speedy restoration—

[After three days, Jonah was, by God's over-ruling providence, disgorged in safety upon dry land: and his commission to preach unto the Ninevites was renewed.

Thus by the resurrection of Christ were the hopes of a ruined world revived. Not only was the ministry of our Lord himself renewed, but all his Apostles also received afresh their commission to preach the Gospel to every creature. Could the Ninevites have foreseen the effects of Jonah's deliverance, how would their hearts have leaped for joy! And well may all the nations of the earth rejoice in the tidings of a risen Saviour, through whom repentance and remission of sins are preached, and by whom the most abandoned of sinners may be brought to God.]

3. Its ultimate success—

[Wonderful indeed was the effect of Jonah's ministrations! and we may well suppose that the relation of his miraculous preservation and deliverance contributed in no small degree to the success of his mission. The people of Nineveh would necessarily conclude, that he was sent of God, and that the denunciations delivered by him would be fulfilled.

And was not this the effect of Christ's resurrection? The very point which all the Apostles most insisted on, was this: "they preached Jesus and the Resurrection:" they preached, "that he died according to the Scriptures, and *rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*" From hence the inference was clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world: and so rapidly did this truth prevail, that in one day, there were converted to him 3000 souls; and, in a very short space of time, the whole Roman Empire was filled with his acknowledged followers.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. On what a firm basis our religion stands—

[The sign which above all others our blessed Lord laid the greatest stress upon, was his fulfilling of this type. Though he gave innumerable proofs of his Divine mission, yet it was to this chiefly, yea, to this only, that he referred the confirmed sceptics. He said, in fact, "I shall die, and rise again the third day without seeing corruption, and shall live for evermore, to perfect the work assigned me. If I rise on the third day, then you will know that I am the Messiah: if I do not, I am contented that you shall account me an impostor." Now, Brethren, you know the means which his enemies used to prevent any collusion among his Disciples; yea, and how incredulous his Disciples themselves were; and consequently, you are sure that he did indeed rise, and that all which God hath spoken by him, or of him, is true: it is true that

that the impenitent and unbelieving shall perish; but that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things."]

2. What has been done for every Believer—

[Though Jonah stands alone in his particular line of experience, there is not a Believer whose soul has not been in as perilous a condition as Jonah himself was at the bottom of the sea; nor one who has not obtained deliverance by the very same means, humiliation and prayer. The experience of David was not unlike to Jonah's[e]; and that of the Church of old is painted in expressions precisely similar to those in the chapter before us[f]. Happy, happy they, who have obtained mercy of the Lord, and can thus attest the efficacy of believing prayer! Let not your feelings, Brethren, be forgotten; but get them written in the tablet of your hearts; and let your acknowledgments be suited to the mercies vouchsafed unto you.]

3. What the Lord will do for all who call upon him—

[Our blessed Saviour, by dying for our offences and rising again for our justification, has procured for us whatever we stand in need of. Even in the denunciations of God's wrath there is an implied promise of mercy, if we repent and turn to God. However great therefore our guilt may be, or however imminent our danger, let us remember, that "with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." Let us remember, that "Jesus is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins;" and that, though we were as much "in the belly of hell" as a *living* creature can be, our cry should come before him into his holy Temple, and "he would bring up our souls out of the pit of corruption:" "after two days he would revive us; in the third day he would raise us up, and we should live in his sight[g]."]

[e] Ps. xl. 1—3. [f] Lam. iii. 54—58. [g] Hos. vi. 1, 2.

DCXXV.

REPENTANCE OF THE NINEVITES *.

Jonah iii. 8—10. *Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth; and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?—And God saw their works, that they turned every one from his evil way: and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*

FIDELITY is necessary to a due discharge of the Ministerial

* A Fast Sermon.

Ministerial office. It is painful indeed to denounce the Divine judgments against sinners; and it often excites their wrath against us. But God often overrules it for good. He gives us reason indeed to expect that he will do so[a]: but perhaps on no occasion did he ever produce so general an effect, as on that which is related in the history before us. Jonah, it should seem, had preached only one day; and the whole city of Nineveh were stirred up to deprecate the judgments denounced against them. We notice in the text,

I. The means they used—

[They *fasted*. The king and his nobles proclaimed a fast, which was immediately kept with universal consent, and with most extraordinary solemnity. The king himself set the example, ("clothing himself in sackcloth, and sitting in ashes;") and all the people, from the highest to the lowest, followed it[b]. The very beasts were not suffered to taste either food or water, that their moanings might augment the general gloom[c]. They *prayed*: yea, "they cried mightily unto God." They saw their guilt and danger; and were suitably affected with the sight. Formal petitions would have ill expressed their sentiments: they pleaded therefore with an importunity expressive of the desire of their souls. Lastly, they *reformed their lives*. The change was not merely of an external nature, or a suppression of some particular evil in the State: it became a personal concern amongst all classes of the people, each putting away his own peculiar sin, and resolving, with God's help, to mortify those evils which had brought down upon him the Divine displeasure. This was the proof of their sincerity; and without this, their fasting and prayers would have been in vain[d].

Let us endeavour to set this scene before our eyes———— What a glorious sight! Would to God we could behold it realized on this day amongst ourselves!]

II. The hopes they cherished—

[They had no promise of pardon or acceptance: they had not even a constructive promise, that is, a promise implied in a command to repent. All the hope they had was founded on a mere general notion of God's mercy; "*Who can tell*, if God will have mercy upon us?" Yet this was sufficient to stimulate them to repentance. And truly, if we reflect upon it, the very possibility of averting the threatened judgments was sufficient. What a dreadful

[a] Jer. xxiii. 22. [b] ver. 5, 6. [c] ver. 7. [d] Isai. lviii. 5, 6.

a dreadful calamity would it have been for such a populous city to be destroyed, like Sodom and Gomorrah!———and how unspeakably more awful the thought of such multitudes being taken, with all their guilt upon them, into the presence of an offended God!———Well might they have employed the forty days that were allotted them, in unwearied supplications day and night, if only the most distant prospect were afforded them of obtaining the wished-for deliverance.]

III. The success they obtained—

[To reverse the sentence might subject the prophet to the imputation of falsehood, and lead to dishonourable thoughts even of God himself, as weak, or mutable, or unworthy to be feared. But God was more careful of their welfare than of his own honour or his prophet's reputation. Having wrought a change upon them, he was glad to change his dispensations towards them. Not that the change was in *him:* it was in *them* only; for the removal of the threatened judgments was an execution, rather than a reversal, of his own decrees; which have from eternity been, to pardon the penitent, and to bless the contrite. And who will say, that the success did not richly compensate for their efforts to obtain it? Even in a temporal view, the mourners were well repaid by the suspension of the destruction that had been threatened: but if we suppose (as we reasonably may) that many were converted to the knowledge of the true God, the blessings that they have experienced, and will to all eternity experience, in the salvation of their souls, would amply recompense them for a whole life spent in weeping and mourning and fasting———]

The USES to which this subject may be applied, are,

1. For reproof—

[These *heathens,* warned only by a *stranger,* humbled themselves *instantly,* though they had nothing but a bare *possibility of pardon* to encourage them: but we, *professed servants of God,* though encouraged by *ten thousand promises,* have withstood calls without number, addressed to us by those whom *we acknowledge as commissioned to watch* for our souls. Look through all classes of the community, and see whether, *even on this day,* there do not appear a shameful disproportion between our humiliation and theirs; and whether we have not reason to fear that "they will rise up in judgment against us, to condemn us, in the last day[e]?" O that we might learn of them; and that our fastings might henceforth be solemn, our prayers fervent, our reformation radical and universal!———]

2. For encouragement—

[What interpositions might we not expect in our behalf, if this

[e] Matt. xii. 41.

this whole nation were affected like the men of Nineveh! And how surely shall every true penitent obtain mercy to his soul! Mark the promises which God has given us in and through his dear Son: how free, how rich, how full! and all of them unalterable[f]! Let the penitent rely on these; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than his soul be left to perish———]

2 Cor. i. 20.

DCXXVI.

JONAH'S GOURD.

Jonah iv. 5—9. *So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.*

WHETHER we look into the Sacred Volume or to the world around us, we are almost at a loss to say which is the greater, the depravity of man, or the tender mercy of our God———In the brief history which we have of the prophet Jonah, they are both exhibited to our view in the most striking colours. Had Jonah been a professed heathen, we should have wondered less at his impiety: but being an Israelite, yea, a prophet too of the Most High God, and, we would fondly hope, a good man upon the whole, we are amazed at the very extraordinary wickedness which he manifested, and no less at the astonishing forbearance exercised by Almighty God towards him. In the former part of his history we have an account of his declining to execute the commission which God had given him to preach to the Ninevites, and,

notwithstanding that rebellious conduct, his preservation in the belly of a fish. In the passage which we have now read, we see his perverseness carried to an extent that seems absolutely incredible, and God's condescension to him keeping pace with his enormities. It relates his conduct in reference to a gourd which God had caused to spring up over him, and which withered within a few hours after it had comforted him with its refreshing shade. That we may place the matter in a clear point of view, we shall notice,

I. His inordinate joy at the acquisition of the gourd—

He was at this time in a most deplorable state of mind—

[He had preached to the Ninevites, and his word had been attended with such power, that the whole city repented, and turned to the Lord with weeping and with mourning and with fasting. This, instead of exciting gratitude in the heart of Jonah, filled him only with rage; because he thought that God, in consideration of their penitence, would shew mercy to them, and that, in consequence of the judgments with which he had threatened them not being executed upon them, he himself should appear an impostor. It was of small importance that there were above a million of souls in the city: the destruction of them was of no moment in his eyes, in comparison of his own honour: he hoped therefore that God would at least inflict some signal judgment upon them, sufficient to attest the truth of his menaces, and to support his credit as a true prophet. With the hope of seeing his wishes realized, he made a booth on the outside of the city, and "sat there to see what would become of the city."]

Then it was that God caused a gourd to spring up suddenly, and cover the booth—

[What amazing condescension! How much rather might we have expected that God would have sent a lion to destroy him, as he had before done to a disobedient prophet! But instead of visiting his iniquity as it deserved, God consulted only his comfort; yes, this very man, who was so "exceedingly displeased" with God's mercy to the Ninevites, that he could not endure his life, and begged of God to strike him dead; this very man, I say, was such an object of God's attention, as to have a gourd raised up over his head "*to deliver him from his grief.*" It should seem as if there was a contest between God and him; he striving to exhaust the patience of Jehovah, and Jehovah striving to overcome by love the obstinacy and obduracy of his heart.]

In

In the acquisition of this gourd Jonah exceedingly rejoiced—

[Had we been told that he was exceedingly *thankful to his God*, we should have been ready to applaud his gratitude: but he saw not God's hand in the mercy vouchsafed to him: it was his own comfort only that he cared about: and in the gift alone did he rejoice, forgetful of the Giver. The idea of a million of souls being saved from perishing in their sins gave him no pleasure: but the being more effectually screened from the heat of the sun himself, made him "exceeding glad." Had his mind been at all in a right state, his own comfort and convenience would have been swallowed up in thankfulness, for the preservation of so many souls, and for having been made the honoured instrument of their deliverance: but love for ourselves, and indifference about others, always bear a proportion to each other in the mind of man: and their connexion with each other was never more strongly seen than on this occasion.]

His inordinate joy at the acquisition of the gourd was more than equalled by,

II. His intemperate sorrow at the loss of it—

God, seeing the ingratitude of Jonah, withdrew the gift soon after it had been bestowed—

[He prepared a worm, which smote the gourd, so that it withered as suddenly as it had grown up. And where is there any gourd without a worm at the root of it? Our comforts may continue for a longer season than Jonah's; but there is in every creature-comfort a tendency to decay; and our most sanguine expectations are usually followed by the most bitter disappointments. Indeed God has wisely and graciously ordained, that abiding happiness shall not be found in any thing but Him alone: and the withdrawment of this comfort was in reality a greater blessing than its continuance would have been; since the gourd could only impart a transient comfort to his body; whereas the removal of it tended to humble and improve his soul.]

But the impatient spirit of Jonah only raged and complained the more—

[As soon as the heat became oppressive to him, Jonah renewed his former wish for death; and, when reproved by God for his impiety, he vindicated himself in the very presence of his God, and declared, that "he did well to be angry, even unto death." Who would conceive that such impiety as this should exist in the heart of any man, but especially of one who had received such signal mercies as he, and been so honoured as an instrument of good to others? But hereby God did indeed shew,

shew, that the excellency of the power was of him alone, and that he can work by whomsoever he will. It seems strange too, that, when God appealed to his conscience, an enlightened man could possibly be so blinded by passion as to give judgment in his own favour in such a case. But man has neither reason nor conscience, when biassed by his own lusts: and his very appeals to God can be little more depended on than the testimony of a man who is deliberately deceitful. But this we may observe in general, that the more there is of unhallowed boldness in any man's confidence, the more it is to be suspected; and the more ready he is to wish himself dead, the more unfit he is for death and judgment.]

Thus far our attention has been almost exclusively turned to Jonah: but, that we may bring the matter home more directly to our own business and bosoms, we would suggest a REFLECTION or two, arising out of the subject:

1. What selfishness is there in the heart of man!—

[One would be ready to account this record a libel upon human nature, if we did not know assuredly that it is a true history, without any exaggeration or mistake. It appears incredible, that such inhumanity should exist in the heart of man, as that he should wish for the destruction of a million of souls, only that his own word might be verified; and that he should be so vexed by his disappointment, as to wish for death, and pray to God to terminate his life. Nor would one conceive it possible that a temporary inconvenience, which had in fact originated solely in his own absurd and impious conduct, should so irritate and inflame his mind, as to make him insult, to his very face, his almighty and all-gracious Reprover. But we know little of ourselves, if we do not recognise much of our own character in that of Jonah. We have had reported to us, time after time, the calamities of others, and have felt no more than if the most trifling occurrences had been related: or if we have felt at all, it has been only for a moment, and the tale has soon become as if it had passed before the flood. But, on the other hand, if any thing has arisen to thwart our own interests or inclinations, though it has been of less consequence than Jonah's gourd, we have laid it to heart, and been so irritated or grieved by it, that our very sleep has gone from us. Particularly if any thing has occurred that was likely to lower our reputation in the world, how keenly have we felt it, so as almost to be weary even of life! Or if any thing wherein we promised ourselves much happiness have been withdrawn from us, as wife or child, how little have we been able to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Alas! we have more resembled Jonah,

Jonah, than Job: our every thought has been swallowed up in self: and neither God nor man have been regarded by us, any farther than they might subserve our selfish and carnal ends. Let us then in Jonah see our own character as in a glass, and let this view of it humble us in the dust.]

2. What mercy is there in the heart of God!—

[This is the improvement which God himself makes of the subject. Jonah had complained of God for exercising mercy towards the repentant Ninevites; and God vindicates himself against the accusations of Jonah. In doing this, he touches with exquisite tenderness the sin of Jonah; and represents him not as actuated by selfishness and impiety, but as merely "having pity on the gourd." What a beautiful example does this afford us, who ought to extenuate, rather than to aggravate, the faults of our bitterest enemies! His argument on the occasion is this: "If you have had pity on a poor worthless gourd, for which you never laboured, and in which you have only a slight and transient interest, how much more am I justified in having pity on a million of the human race, (six-score thousand of whom have never done good or evil,) and on multitudes of cattle also, which must have been involved in any calamity inflicted on that large city!" This argument is similar to one used in the Epistle to the Hebrews[a], and says in effect, If you were right in pitying a thing of no value, how much more am I in sparing what is of more value than ten thousand worlds! This argument, especially as addressed to the self-justifying Jonah, was unanswerable: and the truth contained in it is consolatory to every Child of man. God is a God of infinite mercy: he *may*, he *will*, spare all who truly repent. Whatever judgments he has denounced against sin and sinners, the execution of them depends solely on the sinners themselves: if they repent, sooner shall God cease to exist, than cease to exercise mercy towards them. Let this encourage transgressors of every class: let it encourage the abandoned to repent; and those who profess godliness to repent also: for all need this consoling truth, that "God willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live." Know then, both from his dealings with the Ninevites, and his forbearance towards his perverse prophet, that He is abundant in goodness and truth, and that where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound.]

[a] Ch. ix. 13, 14.

DCXXVII.

BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE WORD OF GOD.

Micah ii. 7. *Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?*

GREAT

GREAT and bitter prejudices are often entertained against the word of God; as though its only tendency was to pervert the judgments of men, and to disturb their repose. Hence, when the word is faithfully administered, many are offended at it; and say, as it were, to the messengers of heaven, "Prophesy not unto us right things; prophesy unto us smooth things; prophesy deceits." But the real reason of their disgust is, that they will not part with those sins which the word condemns, or practise those duties which the word enjoins: "they love darkness rather than light: they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved[a]." If they were willing to renounce their sins, they would find the word precious and delightful to them; for it is as full of consolation to the upright, as it is of terror to the hypocritical. To this effect God speaks in the passage before us. He represents the people as saying to the Prophets, "Prophesy not." Then addressing himself to them, he asks, Whether the messages which he sent them proceeded from any want of love and mercy in himself; or whether they did not arise solely from their obstinacy in sin? "O thou that art named the House of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings?" Then he appeals to them, Whether his word would not be a source of unspeakable comfort to them, if they would turn to him aright? "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?"

We propose to shew,

I. To whom the word of God does good—

Certain it is, that all are not benefited by the word. When it was dispensed by Him who "spake as never man spake," many made no other use of it than to cavil at it, and to make it a ground of accusation against him. And when St. Paul laboured for three months successively to establish the truth, many only were hardened the more in their prejudices and infidelity[b]. While in every age it has been "to some a savour of life unto life, it has proved to others a savour

[a] John iii. 19, 20. [b] Acts xix. 8, 9.

savour of death unto death[c]." Those who alone are benefited by it, are "the people who walk uprightly," or, in other words,

1. The unprejudiced—

[If we come to the word of God with prejudices against any of the doctrines which it is supposed to contain, it is scarcely probable that we should receive any material good from it: for as soon as the truths which we hate are brought to light, we shall set ourselves against them, and exert all our endeavours to invalidate their force. The plainest and most fundamental doctrines of our religion are very commonly treated in this way. Men like not to hear of the depravity of the heart, the insufficiency of our best works to recommend us to God, the necessity of divine influences, and the impossibility of being saved without an entire dependence on the merits of Christ, and an unreserved surrender of ourselves to his service. But if, instead of reprobating these things as enthusiasm, we would lay our minds open to conviction, and submit to receive instruction from God, we should find a reality in these things which we never imagined, and an importance which we were not aware of. God has promised that "the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way[d]."]

2. The diligent—

[Nothing is to be attained without diligence, in spiritual any more than in temporal concerns. If we read a portion of the Scripture in a superficial way, or hear it explained to us without ever reflecting on what we have heard, we cannot expect to get any good unto our souls. Our Lord has illustrated this, by a man sowing seed upon the way-side. Can any one doubt whether the birds will come and take it away? Thus will Satan take the word out of our hearts, if it be not harrowed in by meditation and prayer[e]. Our Lord directs us to "search the Scriptures:" and St. Luke tells us, that saving benefit accrued to the Beræans from their diligence in this respect; "they were more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so:" and then he adds, "*Therefore* many of them believed[f]." This indeed is agreeable to the established order of things throughout the world: for God has ordained, that while "the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, the soul of the diligent shall be made fat[g]."]

3. The humble—

[Pride and self-sufficiency are insurmountable obstacles to religious instruction. If the knowledge of Divine truth were to be acquired merely by mental application, then indeed we might become

[c] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [d] Ps. xxv. 9. [e] Matt. xiii. 4, 19.
[f] Acts xvii. 11, 12. [g] Prov. xiii. 4.

become proficients in it, notwithstanding our dependence were on our own exertions. But we are blind, and must have "the eyes of our understanding enlightened," before we can comprehend the mysterious truths of God: consequently, if we have not humility to pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, we must remain in darkness, with respect to the spiritual import of the word, however carefully we may investigate its literal meaning[h]. We must pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law[i]." We must confess ourselves fools, if we would be truly wise[k]. When we are willing to learn with the docility of little children, then, and then only, shall "the things that are hid from the wise and prudent, be revealed unto us[l]."]

4. The obedient—

[We must have a disposition, yea, a determination through grace, to obey the word, if we would receive any substantial good from it. If we have any secret lust which we will not part with, it is in vain to hope that the word, whether read or preached, can ever profit us. Our bosom sin will necessarily warp our judgment, and dispose us to reject whatever militates against the indulgence of it. Being determined not to obey its dictates, we shall be always ready to dispute its meaning or deny its authority. Hence our Lord lays so great a stress upon an obedient frame of mind: "If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God[m]." It is self-evident, that if a man be visited by the most skilful physician in the universe, he can derive no benefit from his prescriptions, unless he follow them. So, it is in vain that the Scripture shews us infallibly the way to heaven, if we will not forsake that path that leadeth to destruction.]

The character of the persons whom the word of God benefits, being ascertained, let us inquire into,

II. The good which it does them—

But who can estimate this aright? Who can enumerate the benefits resulting from the Sacred Oracles when thus studied, and thus received? We must content ourselves with mentioning only a few of those blessings which will result from the word:

1. It will teach us—

[The Inspired Volume cannot fail of conveying information to every man that peruses it, whatever be the state and disposition of his mind. But there is instruction which none but those who "have an honest and good heart[n]," can receive; and in comparison of which all other knowledge is only as dross and dung. An insight

[h] 1 Cor. ii. 10—14. See also Prov. ii. 1—6. [i] Ps. cxix. 18.
[k] 1 Cor. iii. 18. [l] Matt. xi. 25. [m] John vii. 17. [n] Luke viii. 15.

insight into the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart; a discovery of the glory and excellency of Christ; a view of the devices of Satan, and of the way in which alone he can be successfully opposed; a sight of the beauty of holiness, and of all those glorious privileges that belong to the children of God, are among those invaluable acquisitions which will reward the labours of the humble inquirer.]

2. It will comfort us—

[They who disregard the Holy Scriptures, are often so overwhelmed with their troubles, as to seek refuge in death from the calamities of life. But the person who "draws water from those wells of salvation," finds in them an inexhaustible fund of consolation. He perceives that his trials are all appointed by infinite wisdom; that his Lord and Master drank of the very same cup before him; that tribulation is the way in which all the Saints must walk toward the Promised Land; and that the storms which seem to menace his very life, shall only waft him to his desired heaven. All the wonders of Redemption also furnish him with additional grounds of consolation; and every promise is like the balm of Gilead to his wounded spirit. Such was the benefit which David experienced from the word in his trials[o]; and such shall be experienced by all who "make it their delight and their counsellor."]

3. It will sanctify us—

[The word of God is that which is made the means of our regeneration; and the same is useful for the carrying on of the good work within us. The Apostles were purified in an eminent degree: and our Lord ascribes their sanctification to that as its proper cause; "Now ye are clean, through the word that I have spoken unto you[p]." And St. Paul tells us, that Christ still makes use of it for that end: "He gave himself for the Church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word[q]." Indeed its natural tendency is to effect this, because it points out to us our sins; it makes us to see the guilt and danger in which they involve us; it directs our eyes to Him who will give us the victory over them; and it assures us, that, after we have vanquished all our spiritual enemies, we shall be partakers of endless glory and felicity. Having the precepts for our guide, and the promises for our encouragement, we shall "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and Spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God[r]."]

4. It will save us—

[The word makes us not only wise, but "wise unto salvation." In this view St. Paul told the Corinthians that "he had preached the Gospel to them; and that they had received it, and were standing

[o] Ps. cxix. 92. [p] John xv. 3. [q] Eph. v 25, 26.
[r] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

standing in it; by which also," says he, "ye are saved[s]." And O! how many myriads now in heaven can attest its efficacy in this respect! How must they say, 'That word taught me, when ignorant; quickened me, when dead; comforted me, when afflicted; strengthened me, when weak; and enabled me eventually to overcome all my enemies!' And thus shall all of you say in due season, provided you "walk uprightly" in a diligent study of the Sacred Oracles, and in a humble obedience to the will of God.]

In IMPROVING this subject, we shall,

1. Guard it against misconstruction—

[It is possible that the foregoing statement may be misunderstood: we would therefore suggest some brief hints, by way of explanation.

First then, it is *not the word* that does the good; *but the Holy Spirit, by the word.* If the word itself wrought any thing, its operation would be uniform and universal; or, at least, in a much greater degree than it now is, and people would be benefited by it in proportion to their strength and clearness of their intellect. But the reverse of this is nearer the truth: for the poor and weak receive the Gospel, while the wise and noble reject it[t]. And daily experience proves, that the word then only comes with power, when it comes in the Holy Ghost[u].

Next, it is *not the knowledge of the word* that benefits us, *but the knowledge of Christ in the word.* We might be able to repeat the whole Bible, and yet perish at last. Christ must be known by us; and that, not speculatively, but experimentally: for "there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can saved, but the name of Jesus Christ[x]."

Lastly, our "uprightness" is *not the meritorious cause of the good* we receive, *but the qualification necessary for the reception and enjoyment of what is good.* Nor is this a trifling distinction; for if we be not careful to disclaim all idea of merit, we shall make void the grace of the Gospel, and deprive ourselves of all the benefits to be obtained by it[y].]

2. Enforce it in a way of appeal to your consciences—

[*The text is an appeal,* an appeal of God to the consciences of his enemies. We therefore boldly appeal to you, and defy any man living to answer in the negative; "Do not God's words do good to him that walketh uprightly?"

Judge ye, who have despised the word: look at those of your acquaintance who have obeyed the word; compare their lives with what your remember them to have been, or with what yours are at

[s] 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2. [t] 1 Cor. i. 28—30. [u] 1 Thess. i. 5.
[x] Acts iv. 12. [y] Rom. iv. 14.

at this present time; and say, Whether the word have not done them good?———

But ye, after all, are very incompetent judges: we therefore appeal rather to those who have received the benefit. Ye know what ye have received: say then, Whether ye would exchange it for all that the world can give you? Reflect on the good ye have obtained; the pardon, the peace, the strength, the holiness, the glory; and say, Whether it do not exceed the powers of the first archangel to compute its worth?———

But we need not dwell on this: it admits not of any doubt: all that is requisite is, that you press forward for the attainment of more good. Let the ungodly world say, that the word has done you *harm;* but regard them not. Only let your growth in every thing that is amiable and praise-worthy confirm the truth in our text, and justify the appeal which God himself has made.]

DCXXVIII.

UNIVERSAL ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTIANITY.

Micah iv. 1—4. *In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the House of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the House of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off: and they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

THE prophet Micah was contemporary with Isaiah; and most probably had seen his prophecies. The prophecy before us is almost word for word the same as that in the second chapter of Isaiah, except indeed the concluding part of it, which is peculiar to Micah. The mode in which the prophecy too is introduced is different. In Isaiah, it is the commencement of a new prophecy; but, in Micah, it is the continuation of a prophecy of a very different complexion. Micah was a man of singular fidelity and courage. He declared to all the elders of his nation, and in a way

that

that made a deep impression upon all[a], that on account of their iniquities God would give up their city and Temple, to be destroyed and "plowed up as a field." But, whilst he announced to the Jews God's determined purpose to punish them in this awful manner, he foretold also his intention at a future period to restore them to his favour, and to make them a source of blessings to the whole earth.

This is the substance of the prophecy before us; in elucidating which we shall notice,

I. The universal establishment of the Christian Church.

Here it will be proper to notice,

1. The prediction relative to it—

[The Temple of Solomon was built on a lofty hill: the altars also which were consecrated to false gods, were built on high places: hence the Christian Church is called by the prophet, "the mountain of the Lord's House," and by the apostle Paul, "Mount Zion[b]." Of this Church it is said, that it "shall be established on the top of the mountains," that is, on the foundations of the Jewish Church, and on the ruins of all idol worship. It is the superstructure, for which alone the foundations of Judaism were laid: and, when this edifice shall be complete, all idols shall fall before it, as Dagon before the ark. The period for its completion is in the last days, the days of the Messiah; a period yet future, though, we hope, not far distant. The terms of the prophecy are such as evidently to shew, that the prediction has never yet been fulfilled, and, consequently, that its accomplishment is yet to be expected by us in the appointed time.]

2. The mode of its accomplishment—

["People," or, as Isaiah expresses it, "all nations," "shall flow unto it." Yes, this "mountain shall be established on the top of mountains," and all nations, like a majestic river, "shall *flow* unto it." By this metaphor, which is indeed a most extraordinary one, it is intimated, that all nations shall be *united* in one common sentiment and purpose; that their *progress* towards its completion shall be *irresistible;* and that the whole shall take place under *a preternatural* and divine *influence;* since the natural progress of a river is downward, whereas this shall be upward, to a mountain on the top of other mountains. What a grand idea does this convey!—the natural propensities of all men checked in their course, and their affections directed into a channel, in which Omnipotence alone can uphold them!

But

[a] Jer. xxvi. 18, 19. [b] Heb. xii. 22.

But the mode in which this shall take place is more fully stated by the prophet himself. The people of different and distant lands shall suddenly become penetrated with one common principle, and shall call on one another to unite in one common cause, the cause of true religion. "Come," they will say, "let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, the House of the God of Jacob." Just as, in the days of old, the Jews from every part of their land went up thrice a year to worship at Jerusalem; so will the Gentiles in every quarter of the globe go up with one consent to the mountain of the Lord's House: "God will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear him for ever."

The motives too by which they will be actuated are here distinctly specified. They will not go from regard to a particular ordinance which they feel constrained to obey, nor from a mere carnal partiality, such as the Jews evinced for their native land; but from a real desire to *know*, and *do*, the will of God. It is this which they will contemplate with such peculiar pleasure. In the Christian Church they will have an opportunity of becoming more deeply acquainted with that "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in human flesh," and dying for the sins of men; and they will have ampler means of knowing the whole extent of their duty, which it will thenceforth be their one labour to perform: to attain these things, I say, will be the one object of their ambition; and they will be alike filled with this one desire, to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

This is the change which we expect assuredly to be wrought on the Gentile world in due time; and by this shall the predicted establishment of Christ's Church be fulfilled.]

Yet simple, and as it might be thought weak, are,

II. The means by which it shall be effected—

The mere preaching of the Gospel is the appointed instrument which God will make use of for the attainment of this great end; "The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The Gospel is here called "a law"—

[It is "a law," because it is authoritatively enjoined to be obeyed by every creature under heaven. And it is so called by the prophet Isaiah, who characterizes it as "God's judgment which he would make to rest for a light of the people (the Gentiles;) even as his righteousness (or method for making people righteous before him,) and his salvation, for which all the Isles shall wait, and in which they shall trust[c]." St. Paul also calls it "the law of faith[d]."]

And

[c] Isai. li. 4, 5. [d] Rom. iii. 27.

And by the publication of that shall the great work be effected—

[It was that which produced such wonderful effects in the Apostolic age; and it is still a "weapon mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds" of sin and Satan. It is "the rod of God's strength which was to go forth of Zion," and by which all his enemies are to be subdued before him. If we look into the discourses of the Apostles, we shall find nothing of that high-wrought eloquence for which the orators of Greece and Rome were famed: we shall see little else than a simple exhibition of Christ crucified, and a solemn declaration, that there was "no other name given under heaven whereby any man could be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." This is the truth which still approves itself "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," and still is "made the power of God unto salvation" to many souls. This began to be preached at Jerusalem; and is from thence come forth; and will in due time be "preached unto all nations." No human power shall be called to its aid; no human policy shall co-operate with it: this alone, accompanied with power from on high, and "preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven," will do the work: conviction will flash upon the consciences of thousands, as on the day of Pentecost; conversion will instantly ensue: Christ being erected as "an ensign, all will flock to it," and "a nation be born in a day." He shall be acknowledged by all as the "Shiloh that was to come; and to him shall the gathering of the people be." The doctrine of the cross being universally proclaimed, the *universal flow* shall take place, and "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea."]

From the work itself let us turn to the contemplation of,

III. The fruits that shall everywhere proceed from it—

The Lord Jesus Christ will reign in the hearts of all—

[As Judges of old swayed the sceptre of Israel, so will the Lord Jesus rule over the whole earth; and whatever is contrary to his will, he will "rebuke" and subdue. Nothing will be able to withstand his power: "He will work, and who shall let it?" As in former days, when he brought his people out of Egypt, and planted them in Canaan, he made them triumphant over every enemy, so will he do in the day to which we are looking forward: he will "go on in the chariot of his Gospel, conquering and to conquer," till all his enemies and theirs be put under their feet.]

Then shall peace and happiness universally prevail—

[The distinctions between nations will then be no longer accompanied with rivalry and hate: all will be as children of one common,

common Father, all as members of the same body. War will then no longer be a science, which even the most peaceful nations are constrained to learn for their own preservation: the cultivation of peaceful arts will be the one desire of all; "they will beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and they will learn war no more." Then also personal and domestic peace will abound throughout the world: "every man will sit under his own vine and fig-tree," as in Patriarchal times, none attempting to molest him, and not so much as the fear of molestation existing in his mind[e]. Doubtless the internal peace which all will enjoy in their own heart and conscience is also to be included under this beautiful image: for the very character of Christ himself is, that he is the Prince of peace; and the character of his reign is, that it diffuses "an abundance of peace" throughout his whole empire, so that "the peace of all floweth down like a river." Blessed, blessed state! May "the Lord hasten it, in his time!"]

From this subject we may clearly SEE,

1. What an unspeakable blessing the Gospel is—

[Wherever the Gospel has come with power, these effects may be already in a measure seen. True it is, they are not seen to the extent that they will hereafter be, because real piety is at so low an ebb, even amongst the professed followers of Christ. But from what is partially seen, we may know what shall hereafter obtain throughout all the world. The hateful passions which produce so much hatred and contention in the world, are slain, wherever the Gospel has its due effect; and peace, and love, and every amiable disposition, have an habitual ascendant in the soul. O professors, judge yourselves in relation to this matter: see whether ye be "putting off the old man, which is corrupt, with its deceitful lusts; and be putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness:" and look to it, that, in these and all other respects, ye walk worthy of Him who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.]

2. How we may insure to ourselves all its glorious effects—

[The Gentiles, in the latter days, may well be proposed as a pattern for us in the present day. Let an entire conformity of heart and life to God's revealed will be the one object of our pursuit. Seek knowledge, not for its own sake, but for its influence upon the soul: and seek grace, not for the aggrandisement of yourselves, but that God may be glorified in the whole of your conversation. If you come up to the House of God with such dispositions as these, you will find that there is a power in the word to enlighten and sanctify the soul; and, in proportion as you

[e] Isai. xxxii. 16—18.

you cultivate these dispositions, you will "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

It will also have a good effect to animate and encourage one another. This will characterize the Christians in the latter day: and the influence of social piety will be found most beneficial to your souls. Be careful however, when exhorting others to come up to the House of the Lord, never to omit, in spirit at least, if not in word, "*I will go also*[f]."]

3. What glorious times are hastening upon us—

[We do hope that the times here spoken of are not far distant. Multitudes of us who are here present can remember when the Church was by no means what it now is: even twenty years have made an immense difference; so great, comparatively, has been the out-pouring of God's Spirit, beyond what it has been for centuries before. And we account it no small privilege to live in a day when the greatest Potentates upon earth are uniting, with their subjects of every denomination and description, to disseminate throughout the world the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. By this we may form some little judgment what to expect in that day, when, in every nation under heaven, kings shall be the nursing-fathers, and queens the nursing mothers, of the Church. O blessed times! May God accelerate them! and may we all exert ourselves, as his instruments, to accomplish his will, and to hasten forward these glorious events! If it be thought that these prospects are too good to be ever realized; let any one only compare Britain as it now is, with what it was before the banners of the Cross were erected on our shores; and then he will see no reason to despair of those nations that are yet "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." But were the change far more beyond the reach of human probability than it is, there would be no reason to doubt of its ultimate accomplishment, since Omnipotence is pledged to effect it: It shall take place, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."]

[f] Zech. viii. 20, 21.

DCXXIX.

THE MESSIAH TO BE BORN AT BETHLEHEM.

Micah v. 2. *Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth to me, that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

IN estimating the degree of credit due to prophecy, we naturally ask, Of what kind the prophecies were? Were they numerous? Were the persons who delivered

delivered them unconnected with each other? were the things which were foretold unlikely of themselves to be accomplished? or were they such as might easily, by the united efforts of interested persons, be brought to pass? If they were such only as might be the subjects of reasonable conjecture, or such as might by a confederacy of persons be easily devised and easily fulfilled, they would have but little weight: but if they were inconceivably varied, and absolutely incapable of being either feigned by impostors or fulfilled by friends, they will then carry proportionable evidence along with them. Such then were the prophecies relating to our blessed Lord: they were such as no deceivers could invent, and such as no confederacy whatever could cause to be fulfilled. Many of the most important of them were fulfilled by persons who sought to disprove the pretensions of Jesus to the Messiahship, and who unwittingly established what they laboured to overthrow. Others were accomplished through the instrumentality of persons who could have no conception whatever of the ultimate consequences which their actions would produce. Of this kind was the prediction before us; it declared that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem; not at the Bethlehem in the land of Zabulon, but at that which was in the land of Judah. This, as will be seen presently, was so generally known, that the parents of our Lord might have known it, if they had been at all anxious to make the inquiry. But so little did they advert to it, that they never thought of going up to Bethlehem, till they were compelled to it by a decree of Augustus Cæsar. They were living at Nazareth, and would, if no such unforeseen edict had been issued, have continued there till the birth of Jesus. But the Scripture could not be broken; and God was at no loss to provide means for its accomplishment. He wrought therefore on the ambition of the Roman Emperor, and prompted him to exercise his authority over the Jewish people, and to order that all of them should go and be enrolled in the different cities to which

they belonged. This constrained Joseph (who was of the house and lineage of David) to go up to his own city, Bethlehem, to be enrolled there: and during his stay there (some unforeseen occurrences probably having necessitated him to continue there longer than he had originally expected), the time for Mary's delivery arrived, and, contrary to all human expectation, Jesus was born in the city which had been specified by the prophet Micah seven hundred years before. Thus, whilst the decree of Cæsar shewed, that "the sceptre was now just departing from Judah," and, consequently, that the time for the advent of the Heavenly "Shiloh was come," it unwittingly on his part caused the Messiah to be born in the very city which Micah had foretold.

The prophecy itself gives us such a glorious view of Christ, that we shall do well to enter more fully into it. It declares to us,

I. His advent in time—

Two things the prophet mentions respecting him;

1. The place of his birth—

[Bethlehem was of itself but a small city, and of little importance when compared with many other cities in the land of Judah: but it was the place of David's nativity[a], and the place therefore which God ordained for the birth of David's Son, the Lord Jesus. The prophecy respecting it, we have before said, was generally known, especially among those who were at all conversant with the prophetic writings; so that when Herod sent to the chief priests and scribes to inquire where the Messiah was to be born, they all with one consent declared that Bethlehem was the destined place, and, in confirmation of their opinion, they cited this very passage which we are now considering[b]. And it is curious enough, that many years afterwards, when the enemies of Jesus insisted that, notwithstanding all his miracles, he could not possibly be the Messiah, they adduced this very passage[c]; which, if their premises had been correct, would have fully supported their conclusion: they *knew* that Jesus had been *brought up* at Nazareth; and they *supposed* he had been *born* there: and, if they had been right in this conjecture, he certainly could not be the Messiah; since it was ordained of God, that the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem.

This will account for the remarkable care which God in his providence

[a] 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 11—13. [b] Matt. ii. 3—6. [c] John vii. 41, 42.

providence took, that the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem should be placed beyond a possibility of doubt. Perhaps no other event, scarcely excepting either his death or resurrection, was marked with such a variety of evidence as this. First, it was enrolled in the public records of Bethlehem, in consequence of Cæsar's edict. Next, it was attested by an angel announcing it to the shepherds as they were guarding their flocks by night. Next, this testimony was confirmed by a host of angels, who celebrated it aloud in the hearing of the shepherds. Next, it was marked by a star in the east, which conducted the Magi from a distant country to the very spot, and caused those wise men to carry the report of it back to their own land. Next, it was ascertained by the inquiries of Herod, and the united testimony of all the chief priests and scribes, that Bethlehem was of necessity to be the place. And lastly, it was marked by that most extraordinary act of cruelty, the slaughter of all the infants in and around Bethlehem, "from two years old and under;" which measure king Herod adopted, in order to insure the destruction of Jesus, whom he dreaded as a future rival.

What a confirmation all this is of the Messiahship of Jesus, it is needless to observe.]

2. The character in which he should appear—

[He was to be "Ruler in Israel." If we look only at the *external* circumstances of his birth, we confess he had not much the appearance of a "Ruler," seeing that his parents were in so low circumstances as to be able to get no better place for their accommodation than a stable, (though one would have thought that a person in Mary's situation would have found a thousand females ready to receive her into their house;) nor any better receptacle for the new-born infant than a manger. Nor in his subsequent life did there appear what we should have expected in a "Ruler." To the age of thirty he wrought at the trade of a carpenter: and during the three years of his ministry, he went about as a poor man who "had not where to lay his head." Least of all, in his last hours, did he look like a "Ruler;" since he was treated with nothing but scorn, and put to death as the vilest of malefactors.

Yet even at all these periods, if we look more narrowly, we shall find circumstances that sufficiently declared his dignity. The songs of the heavenly choir at his birth, the miracles he wrought in his life, and the testimony borne to him by universal nature at his death, all proclaimed, that, under the veil of his humiliation, there was a character more than human, and that he was not only a "Ruler," but "King of kings, and Lord of lords."

The Jews, fixing their eyes only on his *external* appearance, deny that this prophecy was fulfilled in him. But we answer, that "his

"his kingdom was never intended to be of this world:" it is a spiritual dominion that he was sent to exercise; and such a dominion as no mere creature ever can exercise. He came to establish his throne in the hearts of men, and to bring their very thoughts into captivity to his holy will. And this empire he has established over millions of the human race, even over the whole Israel of God, in every age, and every place. To all of them without exception his will is both the *rule* and *reason* of their conduct. If only a thing be declared to be his will, that is a sufficient reason for their doing it, though they should see no other reason: and, rather than not do it, they would all without exception lay down their lives. This dominion he is now exercising over a willing and obedient people: and though Satan's vassals are infinitely the more numerous at the present day, the time is coming, when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom" of this great Ruler, when "all kings shall fall down before him," and "all nations shall serve him," and "his name shall be great unto the ends of the earth."]

For submission to this great "Ruler" the prophet prepares us, by declaring,

II. His existence from eternity—

The terms in which this is declared are as strong as the Prophet could well use: they are equivalent to what the Psalmist says of Jehovah; "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God[d]." That Jesus did exist from all eternity is abundantly declared,

1. In the Old Testament—

[There is a remarkable passage to this effect in the book of Proverbs, where, under the name of Wisdom, Jesus is represented as having been, by the "Father, as one brought up with him, as being daily his delight, and rejoicing always before him[e]"———This passage is generally considered by the best Commentators as relating to Jesus Christ; and its exact correspondence with the passage just quoted in reference to Jehovah, and with other passages in the New Testament, leaves no room to doubt, but that Jesus is the person there described. In the book of Psalms, we know infallibly that Jesus is the person spoken of, as "of old laying the foundations of the earth," and as continuing immutably the same to all eternity[f]. We know this, I say, infallibly, because St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, assures us that it was spoken *of*, and *to*, the Son; whom the Father addresses also in these

[d] Ps. xc. 2. [e] Prov. viii. 22—31. [f] Ps. cii. 25—27.

these decisive terms; "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom[g]."]

2. In the New Testament—

[Our blessed Lord himself frequently speaks of his pre-existent state. To Nicodemus he speaks of himself as having come down from heaven, and as actually existing in heaven even whilst in his bodily substance he was on earth[h]. To the Jews who thought of him as a mere man like themselves, he says, "Before Abraham was, I am[i]." And, in addressing his heavenly Father, he prays, "Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was[k]." His Apostles uniformly maintain the same language: "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by *him*; and without *him* was nothing made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us[l]." This is the testimony of St. John: and that of Paul accords with it, that, whilst "*according to the flesh* Jesus was of the seed of David, *according to the spirit of holiness* he was by his resurrection declared to be the Son of God," even "God over all, blessed for ever[m]." In the book of Revelations there is a remarkable passage, where, speaking of our blessed Lord, the beloved Disciple attests his character in these expressive words; "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, THE ALMIGHTY:" and then he introduces that same Jesus speaking personally to him, and saying, "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore; Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death[n]."

From all these testimonies then, we are prepared to welcome the advent of this august Ruler, in the language of the prophet Isaiah; "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and *the government shall be upon his shoulders;* and his name shall be called the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace: and of *the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,* upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever[o]."]

That we may suitably IMPROVE this subject,

1. Let us adore this divine Saviour for his condescension and love—

[How wonderful is it that such love should ever be shewn to

[g] Heb. i. 8, 10—12.
[h] John iii. 13.
[i] John viii. 38
[k] John xvii. 5.
[l] John i. 1—3, 14.
[m] Rom. i. 3, 4. & ix. 5.
[n] Rev. i. 8, 17, 18.
[o] Isai. ix. 6, 7.

to the children of men! that the Son of God, "Jehovah's fellow[p]," who was "one with the Father," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[q]," who "was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, should yet make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, should humble himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross[r]!" How wonderful, I say, is this! and scarcely less wonderful, that We, towards whom this stupendous effort of love and mercy has been exercised, should feel so little, even whilst we profess to believe it, and to make it the foundation of all our hopes. But let us muse upon it; let us muse, till the fire kindle, and we speak with our tongues the wonderful works of God. Nothing but this is heard in heaven: and nothing but this should be heard on earth. Methinks there should be but one song heard amongst us day or night; "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing[s]."]

2. Let us submit to his government—

[Do we look for salvation through our adorable Emmanuel? Let us not forget that he came to be "a Prince as well as a Saviour," a "Ruler" as well as an Instructor. Let us willingly receive him in this character, and cheerfully dedicate ourselves to his service. Let us be his subjects, not in name, but in truth; not by an external profession only, but an internal surrender of our souls to him: let us do this, not by constraint, but willingly; not partially, but wholly, and without reserve. This is our first duty; this is our truest happiness; this is the way in which he expects us to requite him for all his condescension and love; and it is the only way wherein we can manifest our sense of the obligations he has conferred upon us. "He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:" let him find in us such a people; and he will then "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."]

[p] Zech. xiii. 7. [q] Heb. i. 3. [r] Phil. ii. 6—8. [s] Rev. v. 12.

DCXXX.

CHRIST OUR PEACE IN TROUBLE.

Micah v. 5. *This man shall be the Peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.*

IT is of the very nature of prophecy to be dark and intricate: for, if it were perfectly plain, men would either labour to defeat the counsels of heaven,

or

or ascribe the accomplishment of them to second causes. Among the various things which tend to obscure the predictions of the Prophets, we notice more especially their complicated allusions to things temporal and spiritual, present and remote. In the prophecy before us considerable difficulties occur, because it is so expressed as to comprehend several distinct events, and to be accomplished in a variety of ways: nevertheless the general scope of it is sufficiently plain; and the truth which we shall deduce from it, is obvious and indubitable: it is none other than this, that Jesus Christ is the one source of peace to his people, under all their calamities, temporal or spiritual[a].

Christ then will be the peace of his Church—

I. Under all temporal calamities—

God may, for wise and gracious reasons, suffer his people to be reduced to the greatest straits and necessities; just as he did in the days of Hezekiah, when all Judea was subdued by Sennacherib, and the Capital itself was besieged by the Assyrian army. We must not therefore conclude that God has given us up, even though we should see our land invaded, and many strong places taken, and the Capital itself in the most imminent danger of being plundered and destroyed. God may suffer it, in order to wean us from confiding in our fleets and armies, and to glorify himself in our deliverance. Supposing such a calamity to come upon this land, Christ will be our peace,

I. Through the instrumentality of others—

[In the words following the text, he promises to raise up for his

[a] The meaning of the context seems to be this: the Prophet foretells that the enemies of Judah should "besiege" them, and treat their Governor with contempt and cruelty; which may be considered as relating to the times of Hezekiah, and Zedekiah. He then foretells, that in the little city of Bethlehem the Messiah shall be born: but that, notwithstanding that event, the Jews, as a nation, shall be given up, till the time when Zion shall travail in birth (Isai. lxvi. 7, 8. with Gal. iv. 27.) and all, both Jews and Gentiles, be converted to the Lord. In the mean time, however, the Messiah shall govern and protect his people, and be a source of "peace" and comfort to them under their heaviest calamities.

his people "seven shepherds and eight principal men," that is, an *indefinite* number[b] of eminent and useful men in all the departments of State, whom he would endue with wisdom and courage; and through whose instrumentality he would effect their deliverance. And is it not in this way that he has most marvellously interposed for *us*? Was there ever a period within our remembrance, when all ranks and orders of men were so unanimous as at the present? In the last war, some doubted whether we might not have avoided war; and others, whether we might not have terminated it long before. But is there a man in this whole kingdom who doubts whether our inveterate enemy would suffer us to be at peace; or whether if we were to make all the sacrifices that his ambition could dictate, he would not speedily find some fresh pretext for insult and exaction? No; we are unanimous in our conviction of the unavoidableness of war; unanimous too in our determination to maintain it with vigour, and to die rather than become the vassals of France: and this is a source of much peace and comfort to us in the midst of our impending dangers.* And to whom can we ascribe this astonishing unanimity, but to Him who "has all hearts in his hand, and turneth them whithersoever he will?"]

2. Through his own immediate agency upon our minds—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is the Governor of the Universe; and he makes his people to know, that *their enemies derive all their power from his commission—the limits of which they cannot exceed—and the effects of which shall be overruled for good.* These are sources of unspeakable peace to their souls. Suppose "the Assyrian to be come into our land" and to be bearing down all before him, our murmurs will be silenced by that reflection, "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it[c]?" The enemy is no more than "the axe with which HE hews, or the saw with which HE saws[d];" "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good[e]." Suppose the enemy to be vaunting like the blaspheming Rabshakeh, and to be regarding the riches of the capital as a nest of eggs on which he is just going to lay his hands[f]; even then, if the plunder of the Capital be not within his commission, "God will put a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his jaws, and will cause him to return to his own land" ashamed and confounded[g]. Suppose he be suffered entirely to prevail, yet if it be over ruled for the good of immortal souls, and the glory of our God, no temporal trials, however great, can counterbalance the benefit derived from them. It was by sending his people to Babylon that he cured them of idolatry; and if he may but cure this nation

[b] Eccl. xi. 2.
[c] Am. iii. 6.
[d] Isai. x. 14.
* Preached in July 1803.
[e] Isai. x. 15.
[f] 1 Sam. iii. 18.
[g] Isai. xxxvii. 33—35.

nation of its manifold impieties, all will be well. In these views then Christ will surely be the peace of his people, yea, he "will keep them in perfect peace, whose minds are stayed on him[h]."]

But these observations apply to us yet more forcibly,

II. Under all spiritual troubles—

There is not in all the Sacred Volume one single prophecy that more clearly speaks of Christ than that before us. It is repeatedly applied to Christ in the New Testament, as marking out with precision the very place where he should be born[i]. In explaining it therefore as referring to his spiritual kingdom, we cannot err.

The enemies of God's people of old were typical of those spiritual enemies with which his people have to contend in every age. And it is certain that the enemies of our souls may prevail for a season in a very alarming degree. But when sin and Satan make their fiercest assaults, even then will Christ maintain our peace,

1. By the merit of his blood—

[This it is which enables us to behold all our guilt without terror or despondency: this it is which enables us to answer the accuser of the Brethren, "Who is he that shall condemn, since Christ has died?" In this view especially is Christ called "our peace," since "he made peace for us by the blood of his cross;" and every one of us by believing in Him shall have peace with God[l].]

2. By the prevalence of his intercession—

[The prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah were effectual for the peace of Jerusalem, even while the besiegers encompassed it[m]: and in answer to them, 185,000 of the Assyrian army were slain by an angel in one night[n]. What then may not be expected from the prayers of our adorable Redeemer? Shall not *he* prevail, seeing that "He ever liveth on purpose to make intercession for us[o]?" To this, as to an inexhaustible source of consolation, we are taught to look, under the conflicts which we are called to sustain; "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the propitiation for our sins[p]."]

3. By the sufficiency of his grace—

[We

[h] Isai. xxvi. 3. [i] ver. 2. with Matt. ii. 6. & John vii. 42.
[k] Rom. viii. 34. [l] Rom. v. 1. [m] Isai. xxxvii. 22.
[n] Isai. xxxvii. 36. [o] Heb. vii. 25. [p] 1 John ii. 1.

[We may be reduced to a more perilous condition than even Jerusalem itself, and yet find peace in the consideration, that Christ is all-sufficient, and that "through him we shall be more than conquerors." We can scarcely conceive a more distressing experience than that of Paul under the buffetings of Satan: yet this word, "My grace is sufficient for thee," was able to turn his desponding sorrows into joy and triumph[p]. In like manner we also may go forth with confidence against all our enemies, saying with him, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me[r]."]

4. By the inviolableness of his promise—

[To all his people is that word addressed, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee[s]?" And can we find one instance wherein he has ever violated that blessed promise? May we not then adopt that inspired inference, and say, "I will not fear what flesh can do unto me[t]?" If the Apostles, when almost overwhelmed in a storm, were blameworthy for entertaining fears while Christ was with them in the vessel[u], much more must we be faulty, if we give way to discouraging apprehensions of ruin, when the word of Christ is pledged for our security. Relying on his word, we have an anchor which will keep us stedfast in the midst of all the storms and tempests that can assault our souls[x].]

APPLICATION:

[*Let every one then seek to know this "Prince of Peace."* To "acquaint ourselves with him is the way to be at peace[y]." If we know him not, we cannot flee to him for refuge: but if we "trust in him, he will keep us in perfect peace."]

[p] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [r] Phil. iv. 13. [s] Josh. i. 5. [t] Heb. xiii. 5, 6.
[u] Mark iv. 38—40. [x] Heb. vi. 19. [y] Job xxii. 21.

DCXXXI.

THE JEWS A BLESSING TO THE WORLD.

Micah v. 7. *The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.*

IN this chapter we have as explicit a prophecy respecting Christ, as any that is to be found in all the Sacred Volume. His person is described in terms that can belong to none but Jehovah himself: "His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting[a]." The place of his nativity is expressly mentioned, and so plainly mentioned, that all the Scribes and Pharisees

[a] ver. 2.

Pharisees at the time of our Saviour's birth considered it as an indisputable point, that their Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem; and not in the Bethlehem that was in the land of Zabulon[b], but in Bethlehem Ephratah, which was in the land of Judah[c]. The establishment of his kingdom over the face of the whole earth was farther predicted[d]; and not only is the final restoration of the Jews to a participation of it declared[e], but their agency in the conversion of the Gentile world is distinctly asserted[f]. Whatever accomplishment the words of our text received in the Apostolic age by the preaching of the Apostles and their immediate converts, they have respect to a period far remote from that age, a period yet future: they refer to a time, when Jehovah will gather his people from the four winds, and reign over them in their own land[g]; a time, when they shall vanquish all their enemies, as easily as a young lion prevails over a flock of sheep[h]; but shall be as rich blessings to others, as the dew or rain is to the thirsty earth.

To place this subject in a proper point of view, it will be necessary to shew,

I. The original design of God in their dispersion—

Once they were numerous as the stars of heaven: but now they are reduced to a small "remnant;" and are scattered over the face of the whole earth. This judgment is designed of God,

1. To punish their iniquities—

[Great and manifold were their transgressions, which caused them to be carried captive to Assyria and Babylon: but greater far has been their guilt in rejecting their Messiah, and "crucifying the Lord of glory:" and for that they have now been carried captive amongst all nations, and been reduced to the lowest state of degradation for the space of more than seventeen hundred years. The punishment inflicted for this crime is such as was foretold by Moses himself[i], and such as our blessed Lord also warned them to expect[k]. The Jews themselves see and acknowledge, that the hand of God is upon them on account of their sins: and it is God's intention

[b] Josh. xix. 10, 15. [c] Matt. ii. 4—6. [d] ver. 4. [e] ver. 3, 6.
[f] The text. [g] Mic. iv. 6, 7. [h] ver. 8.
[i] Lev. xxvi. 27, 33. Deut. xxviii. 62—64. [k] Matt. xxi. 39—41.

intention that his dispensations towards them should be viewed in this light by every nation under heaven[l].]

2. To bring them to repentance—

[In this present world the judgments which God inflicts are all intended for good. It was "for their good" that God sent his people into captivity in Babylon[m]: and for their good he has now scattered them over the face of the earth. The punishment inflicted on Levi for his cruelty to the Shechemites, was, that he and his family, should have no lot among the tribes of Israel, but be scattered amongst them all[n]: yet was that overruled for their greater honour; they being appointed to minister in the Sanctuary before the Lord; and pre-eminently honoured, as having the Lord himself for their portion[o]. In like manner, though the present dispersion of the Jews is a heavy judgment, God inflicts it, not as the sentence of an inexorable Judge, but as the correction of a loving Parent: and the very circumstance of his transferring his regards from them to the Gentile world, is a yet farther expression of his parental love, it being designed to provoke his deserted people to jealousy, and thus to bring them to a renewed enjoyment of their forfeited inheritance[p]. "They are cast off only for a season[q];" and, "if they abide not in unbelief, they shall yet again be grafted on their own stem," from which they have been broken off[r].]

But in the prophecy before us, our attention is particularly called to,

II. The ulterior purposes which they are destined to accomplish—

The dew and rain are sent by God to fertilize the earth[s]: and in like manner are the Jews dispersed throughout the world,

1. As witnesses for him—

[Whoever beholds a Jew, beholds a witness of *the proper Deity* of Jehovah. The whole of his history attests, that the Lord Jehovah is Lord of lords, and God of gods. Who amongst the gods of the Heathen could ever have done for their votaries what Jehovah has done for his chosen people? Who amongst them could have predicted every thing that should befal them during the space of many thousand years? Who could have preserved their worshippers, as Jehovah has preserved

[l] Deut. xxix. 24—28.
[m] Jer. xxiv. 5. & Mic. iv. 10.
[n] Gen. xlix. 5—7.
[o] Numb. xviii. 2—24.
[p] Rom. xi. 11.
[q] Rom. xi. 25, 26.
[r] ib. ver. 23, 24.
[s] Isai. lv. 10.

served his, unmixed with the people amongst whom they are scattered, and as distinct from all other people as they were when embodied in the land of Canaan? Other nations, that have been subdued and carried captive, have been blended at last with the inhabitants of the countries where they sojourned; but the Jews still, as formerly, "dwell alone in the midst of the earth," as it was foretold they should do[t]. Hence they, above all people, are witnesses of his godhead. And in this view God himself appeals to them, yea, and appeals to the whole universe on the authority of their testimony[u]. We may say then of the Jews in every place throughout the world, that they are *living epistles* from God to man, yea, are "epistles known and read of all men;" so that whatever be the language of the country where they live, they do unwittingly, yet most intelligibly and unquestionably, proclaim, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God[x]."

They are witnesses also of all *his glorious perfections*. Who that sees a Jew can help seeing in him *the power and love*, which God manifested to his fathers in all the wonders of his grace; in their very origin from parents, who, according to the course of nature, could have had no children; in bringing them forth also out of the land of Egypt, and carrying them in safety to the Promised Land, and, in short, in all his other dealings with them to the present moment? Who can but see also *the purity and holiness* of Jehovah, as marked in the judgments inflicted on them? Is it not evident, that they are monuments of God's wrath; and that, though God may spare long, he will at last visit the offences of his rebellious people? Above all, Who that sees a Jew, does not see in him *the truth and faithfulness* of Jehovah? God promised, that for Abraham's sake he would not utterly cast them off: and, notwithstanding all their provocations, he still preserves them, in order to their future restoration to their own land, and their renewed enjoyment of his special favour. David, expatiating on all the glorious perfections of God, interrupts, as it were, his song by what appears, at first sight, to be an unsuitable and irrelevant observation; "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the Children of Israel[y]." But this one observation speaks more than the whole psalm besides; for it embodies all that is more particularly expressed, and gives, what we may call, a graphical exhibition, or picture, of the Divine character; and in the fewest possible words shews us, what will be God's conduct towards his people to the end of time. Precisely thus the sight of a Jew gives us a compendious view of all the Divine perfections, and sets God himself, as it were, almost visibly before our eyes.]

2. As

[t] Numb. xxiii. 10.
[u] Isai. xliii. 9—12. & xliv. 6—9.
[x] 1 Kin. xviii. 39.
[y] Ps. ciii. 7.

2. As instruments in his hands to dispense his blessings to the world—

[The dew that floats in the air, and the clouds that are carried over the surface of the globe, are unconscious of the end for which they are sent; but they perform the most invaluable offices for the sons of men. In like manner the Jews are scattered through the world, unconscious of any particular good which they are destined to perform; but God designs to use them as his instruments, and by them to communicate the blessings of Salvation to the whole world. This is plainly intimated in our text, and expressly declared by the prophet Isaiah; "They shall declare my glory among the Gentiles, and shall bring them for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations[z]." Then shall be fulfilled, in its utmost extent, that prophecy of Zechariah, "It shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the Heathen, O House of Judah, and House of Israel, so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing[zz]."

For this office they are fitted, having their own Scriptures in their hands, and understanding the language of the different countries where they sojourn; so that nothing is wanting but to have the veil removed from their hearts, and they are ready at this moment, each in his place, to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. And with what energy will they proclaim the Gospel, the very first moment that their eyes are opened! How deeply will they themselves be affected; and how much therefore will they affect others! How will they, when they "look on Him whom they have pierced, mourn, and be in bitterness, even as one that is in bitterness for his first-born[a]!" And how ardently will they love, when they see how much has been forgiven them[b]! How will they emulate the example of their fathers, the Apostles, in their zeal to spread the knowledge of their Messiah! and, when they hear that their Brethren in every country under heaven are engaged in the same blessed work, how will they vie with each other in their endeavours to serve the Lord! With what effect too will they deliver their message! They are known everywhere to be the bitterest enemies to Christianity. They will not therefore be regarded, (as Christian Preachers would be,) as a people endeavouring to propagate their own religion, but as people renouncing their own religion from conviction, and calling upon all other people to follow their example. This will create an interest which no other people could hope to excite: and the simultaneous efforts of their Brethren in every quarter of the globe, accompanied as they will be by the operations of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of men, will bear down all before them, like another Pentecost, and produce,

as

[z] Isai. lxvi. 19, 20.
[zz] Zech. viii. 13.
[a] Zech. xii. 10.
[b] Luke vii. 47.

as it were, a resurrection from the dead[c]. "THEN shall the Heathen fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth His glory[d]:" and then shall be literally fulfilled those words of the prophet, "A nation shall be born in a day[e]."

Now in all this they will be, not as the canals which were made by man, to water the earth[f], but as the dew or rain, "that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." As the clouds are not formed by man's device, or sent by the command of men, but owe both their original and their operations to God alone; so the Jews have gone to the ends of the earth, unsolicited, unsent, unconscious of their destiny; and in due time will exert such a genial influence on the souls of men, that "the wilderness shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose[g]."]

From hence we may SEE,

1. In what light we should regard the Jews—

[It cannot be but that God, in dispersing the Jews over the face of the whole earth, has designed, that we should gather instruction from his dispensations towards them, and subserve in some secret way his purposes towards them.

Wherever we see a Jew, we should regard him as an object *from whom we are to derive good*, and *to whom we are to do good*. There is no creature under heaven from the sight of whom we may derive greater good than from the sight of a Jew. We have before said, that, whether intentionally or not, he proclaims to all, in the most convincing way, both the nature and the perfections of God. But there is one lesson in particular which we may learn from him, namely, the guilt and danger of neglecting the Lord Jesus Christ. It was for rejecting and crucifying their Messiah that God's wrath fell upon that whole nation; and that it has now abode upon them for the space of almost eighteen hundred years. They knew him not; for "had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory:" yet, notwithstanding their crime admits of this extenuation, it has been visited with a punishment unprecedented in the annals of the world. What guilt then must *we* contract, and of what punishment shall *we* be thought worthy, if we "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame," by continuing in our sins! *We* profess to know him, and to honour him, and to expect salvation from him: our conduct therefore in pouring contempt upon him is aggravated in a ten-fold degree. Oh! how shall *we* escape? If such things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If such judgments have been executed on them, what must be the end of *us*,

[c] Ezek. xxxvii. 10. with Rom. xi. 15.
[d] Ps. cii. 13—15. Mark the word "*So*."
[e] Isai. lxvi. 8. [f] Deut. xi. 10, 11. [g] Isai. xxxv. 1.

us, if *we* obey not the Gospel of Christ?———Brethren, I intreat you never to look upon a Jew, without recalling to your minds this salutary and important lesson ———

Yet be not content with deriving good from him, but put forth all your powers to do good to him. He, notwithstanding all the chastisements that are upon him, is still "beloved of God for his fathers' sakes. And, if he is beloved of God, should he not be beloved of you? If God have designs of love towards him, should not you seek to be an instrument in God's hands to accomplish towards him those gracious purposes? Can you think of the obligations which you are under to the Jews of former days, and not labour to requite them in their posterity? Or can you reflect on the purposes which are to be accomplished by the Jews in the present and future generations, and not endeavour to fit them for the work to which they are destined? If you have any love to the *Gentile* world, you should bestow all possible care on the instruction of *the Jews*, since it is by the Jews chiefly that the Gentiles will be brought into the fold of Christ. Oh! delay no longer to make this improvement of the circumstances before your eyes; but awake to all the calls of duty, of gratitude, and of love———]

2. What ends we *ourselves* should endeavour to answer in our respective spheres—

[Doubtless we should not live for ourselves, any more than they: we should all be inquiring, What can I do for God? or, what can I do for man? This is truly Christian; or, rather I should say, it is god-like. God himself is represented as resembling the rain [h], and being like the dew [i]: and oh! what glorious effects does his descent upon the soul produce [k]! Would to God that we might live for the same ends, and produce, according to our measure, the same effects! Let every one know, that all his faculties, and all his powers, are the Lord's. Let all regard their time, their property, their influence, as talents committed to them by their God, to be improved for Him who has entrusted them to their care. If it be thought by any, that their talent is only as a single drop or two upon the barren ground, and too small to be of any use, let them remember, that a cloud is but an assemblage of drops; and that, if we only contribute according to our power, we may hope soon to see this "wilderness of ours become as Eden, and this desert as the garden of the Lord [l]." We look for such a season both among Jews and Gentiles: and may we not expect it also amongst ourselves? Yes surely: if we were all, Ministers and people, to unite our efforts for this end, God would be with us; our labour should not be in vain [m]: children should be born to God in this our "Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all [n];" her children should be numerous as the piles of grass [o]; yea, "the birth

[h] Hos. vi. 3. [i] Hos. xiv. 5. [k] ib. ver. 6. [l] Isai. li. 3.
[m] Isai. lv. 11. [n] Gal. iv. 26, 27. [o] Ps. lxxii. 16.

birth of her womb should be as the dew of the morning[p]." May God give us to see such a season of revival in the midst of us, and throughout our whole land, for Christ's sake!]

[p] Ps. cx. 3.

DCXXXII.

THE SUM OF PRACTICAL RELIGION.

Micah vi. 6—8. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

IN human judicatories, offenders are arraigned, witnesses examined, sentence passed, in order to the punishment of crimes. But God has raised a tribunal, to which he summons his offending creatures, in order that when their mouths are stopped and they plead guilty before him, he may pardon their iniquity, and restore them to his favour.

We have, in the chapter before us, God bringing a charge against his people, and calling upon the hills and mountains to judge between them. He first challenges them to allege any thing against him that can in any respect excuse their disobedience, or extenuate their guilt: and, when they are unable to do it, he proceeds to set forth his conduct towards them as the greatest *aggravation* of their guilt. He instances this in two particulars; in his exertions for them when he brought them out of Egypt into the wilderness; and in his kindness to them just when he was bringing them out of the wilderness into Canaan; when he over-ruled the evil purposes of Balaam, and constrained him to bless those whom he had been hired to curse. This having produced on some the desired effect, a repenting Jew is introduced, anxiously inquiring how he may be reconciled to his Maker, and

serve him acceptably in future? and God, instead of inexorably consigning him over to the punishment he has deserved, prescribes to him the way wherein he must walk, and wherein he shall obtain the favour he desires.

Some have understood these words as proceeding from Balak and Balaam: but Balak had no such wish to please God: on the contrary, he wanted nothing so much as to destroy his people: and Balaam expressed no such solicitude to lead Balak to a holy life; but, on the contrary, taught him how to ruin the souls of God's people, by tempting them to an illicit intercourse with the daughters of Midian.

The view before given seems to be the more just: and agreeably to it we shall consider,

I. The inquiries of an awakened soul—

A person convinced of his lost estate, cannot but desire to obtain peace with God—

[The most abandoned sinner, previous to the illumination of his mind by the Spirit of God, will be regardless of his state, and unconcerned about the account which he must give of himself at the judgment-seat of Christ. But, when once his eyes are opened to see his guilt and danger, he can no longer be indifferent about his eternal interests: he feels that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of God: and, however hardened he may have before been, he will cry out with agony of mind, "What shall I do to be saved[a]?" — — —]

But the ways he devises for his restoration to the Divine favour are invariably erroneous and absurd—

[The Jew, like all others of his own nation, first proposes a compliance with the ordinances of the ceremonial law; then, if that will not suffice, he will multiply them, so as to offer, if possible, thousands of rams instead of one, and "ten thousands of rivers of oil," instead of about one or three pints, prescribed for the meat-offerings[b]. If this be not of sufficient value, he is ready to offer even his first-born Son; determined, that neither the heathen Deities shall be more honoured than Jehovah[c], nor Abraham himself perform a more self-denying act of obedience than he[d].

Such

[a] Acts ii. 37. & xvi. 30. [b] Lev. xiv. 10, 21. Exod. xxix. 40.
[c] 2 Kin. xvii. 16, 17.
[d] This idea will account for such a proposal in the mouth of a *penitent* Jew. Gen. xxii. 2, 16.

Such are the means whereby men still hope to recommend themselves to the Divine favour. They will multiply rites and observances far beyond what God himself has required: they will very readily submit to penances, and mortifications, and all manner of painful discipline: but to part with their bosom lusts, and to obtain a thorough renovation of their souls, they have no wish: they rest in *external* services; and substitute them in the place of an inward change of heart, and a thorough conversion unto God. And though we are not shocked at such views, as we are at the proposals of the Jew, yet are they, in fact, as derogatory from the Divine honour, and as unsuitable to the end proposed, as the grosser conceptions that are expressed in the text. The inquiries may be considered as two-fold; first, How shall I obtain reconciliation with God? and next, How shall I walk so as to please him? Now is there any thing in external ceremonies, of whatever kind they be, calculated to answer either of these ends? Can superficial penitence, and ritual observances, worthless as they are in themselves, and still further debased by a presumptuous affiance in them, stand in the place of deep contrition, humble faith, and universal obedience? ———]

Their futility will appear from,

II. The answer of God to them—

God "has shewn to every person what is good"—

[It is true that God did require offerings and sacrifices under the Law: but he did not require them *in lieu of* obedience[e]; nor *in preference to* obedience[f]; nor at all *for their own sake*[g]: when used in any of these views, they were even hateful in his sight[h]: and on account of the abuse made of them, he calls them "statutes which were *not good*[i]." He had declared by Moses, that the thing which *alone* he required, and to which all the ceremonial ordinances were subservient, was, the obedience of a humble and devoted heart[k].]

And the things specified in the text have an exclusive title to that character—

[Our blessed Lord, apparently referring to these words, throws the true light upon them[l]. He shews that the Pharisees substituted *ceremonial* in the place of *moral* obedience: and that, while punctilious and exact in outward observances, they neglected those things which God principally required,—"*judgment, mercy,* and *faith.*" *These are the very things mentioned in the text:* for

[e] Isai. i. 10—17. [f] 1 Sam. xv. 22.
[g] Ps. l. 4—14. (Here is the same controversy as in the text.) & li. 16, 17.
[h] Am. v. 21—24. Isai. lxvi. 3. [i] Ezek. xx. 25.
[k] Deut. x. 12, 13. [l] Matt. xxiii. 23.

for the "walking humbly with God" evidently implies a *humble and believing dependence* on him.

Behold, then, what the Lord our God requires of us. First, we must "do justly."—It is in vain to think that we can ever please God, if we be not honest and just in all our dealings. Truth in our words, and integrity in our actions, are so essential, that a man may as well call himself an angel as a Christian, if he be allowedly defective in either. An adulterous Christian, or a murderous Christian, is not a greater contradiction in terms, than a lying Christian or a dishonest Christian. Hear this, ye professors of religion; and examine whether in your several trades and callings a dependence can be placed upon your word; and whether you are careful to "keep a conscience void of offence toward God and man:" and let it never be said of you, "They will talk about religion indeed, but they will lie and cheat as much, and perhaps more, than other people: a man of the world is more to be depended on than they." Oh, if you give occasion for such a scandal as this, cast off your religion at once; or else get it purified from these base and damning defilements.

Next, We must "love mercy"—Justice admits of no degrees: we must be just or unjust; and therefore we are told to *do* justice. But mercy has gradations that are of an unlimited extent: and therefore we must *love* mercy; or we shall never attain such a measure of it as will adorn our holy profession. Mercy includes every act and office of love, at least as far as relates to the distressed, the indigent, or the offending. And this disposition must be cultivated in all its branches with assiduity and delight. This constitutes the image of God upon the soul: and therefore we are exhorted to "be merciful, even as our Father which is in heaven is merciful." Indeed if we shut up our bowels of compassion from a needy brother, all pretences to the love of God are vain and hypocritical [m]. Hear then again, ye who profess godliness; and bring your experience to this touchstone. See whether you are filled with tenderness and compassion towards the bodies and souls of your fellow-creatures? See whether you not only *do* a kindness when called upon, but whether you "*devise* liberal things," and deny yourselves with a view to the more extensive exercise of benevolence? Look at a professor that is hard-hearted, griping, covetous, vindictive; what a monster does he appear! how unlike to that adorable Jesus who laid down even his own life for his very enemies! Are there such people in the world? O "tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon."

Finally, We must "walk humbly with God."—We have already shewn the construction which our Lord puts upon these words, and that, without any force, they include the most essential doctrines

[m] 1 John iii. 17.

trines of the Gospel. Indeed this requisition comprehends all our duty to God, as the two foregoing do our duty to our neighbour. Now our duty to God is, to "*walk with*" him, as Enoch and Noah did; and to walk "*humbly*" with him, in a believing dependence on his grace to help us, and his mercy to pardon our defects. Without this, our attention to relative duties will be of no avail. This chiefly distinguishes the true Christian from a proud self-righteous Pharisee. There certainly are people of the world, who are eminent for their honour and integrity, their benevolence and liberality: but when we inquire into their secret walk with God, they are found miserably defective; and especially with respect to the humiliation of their souls, and their exercise of faith on Christ. It is in the relative duties, that the hypocrite fails; and in the duties to God, that the defects of the Moralist appear. But both of them, though in different ways, are departed from God, and in the high road to destruction. Examine yourselves therefore, ye decent and externally blameless characters; search and try how it is with you in your secret chambers; see whether you be not habitually and allowedly wanting in respect of brokenness of heart, and a stedfast cleaving unto Christ? And remember, that, while you cherish such pride and self-sufficiency in your hearts, you are as far from heaven as the most abandoned profligate; for "God will resist the proud, and give grace only to the humble[n]."]

We shall conclude with a word of CAUTION,

1. To the careless and secure—

[We hear this passage quoted by many, with a view to subvert all the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: 'Tell us not,' say they, 'about regeneration, or faith in Christ: this is my religion; "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."' But can it be supposed that the prophet intended to contradict every other part of the Inspired Writings, and to tell us that morality was *all*, and Christ *nothing*? It has already appeared, from the words of Christ himself (wherein he seems to have referred to the very passage before us), that "*faith* is one of the weightier matters of the Law;" and that an acknowledging of ourselves to be lost sinners, and a believing in Christ for salvation, are absolutely essential to a humble walk with God. Let not then this mistaken confidence deceive you. Rest not in such an interpretation of the text as directly opposes the whole tenor of Scripture. But, if you will persist in this perversion of God's word, inquire, Whether you have perfectly, and at all times, complied with these directions? and know, that if you have not, you shall be judged out of your own mouth, and be condemned by your own law.]

2. To those who are concerned about their souls—

[As

[n] Jam. iv. 6.

[As you must shortly appear before God, it becomes you to inquire, "wherewith you shall come before him with acceptance?" and in answering this important question, there are two things against which you must guard with equal care, namely, a self-righteous dependence on your own works, and a presumptuous hope of salvation, while you live in any known sin, whether of commission or of omission. Nothing but Christ's obedience unto death can form a proper ground of your hope: yet nothing but a life wholly devoted to God can evidence your interest in Christ. If your faith be productive of good works, it is lively, and saving; if not, it is dead, worthless, delusive. Seek then a humble faith in order to a holy life. If ye will offer sacrifices, let them be "those of a broken and contrite spirit:" if ye will "give a first-born for your transgression," let it be God's First-born, yea, his only-begotten Son. But never forget that your duties to God and to your neighbour are of equal and immutable obligation; and that according to your performance or neglect of them you will be acquitted or condemned.]

DCXXXIII.

ADDRESS OF THE JEWISH CHURCH TO HER ENEMIES.

Micah vii. 8—10. *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Then she that is mine enemy shall see it: and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.*

IT is a matter of general complaint, that the Minor Prophets are difficult to be understood: and this is true to a considerable extent: but we apprehend that it arises very much from our not sufficiently bearing in mind the subjects on which they wrote. We do right in looking for many things applicable to the Messiah, and to his Church and kingdom: but we err in not having more respect to the Jewish Church as it existed in the times when the Prophets wrote; and as it shall exist at a period yet future, when that people shall be gathered in from their present dispersion, and be restored to their own land.

We

We complain that we cannot unlock those Scriptures; but we neglect to take the key that alone will fit the wards. If we kept the Jews more in view, many of the difficulties would vanish; and innumerable beauties would be seen in passages that are now passed over as devoid of interest. We believe verily that the day is fast approaching, in which "God will shew them marvellous things," not a whit inferior to those which he wrought for them when he brought them out of Egypt[a]: and it is their privilege to be looking forward to that period, with earnest and assured expectation of the blessings prepared for them. In the prospect of that period, the Jewish Church is represented by the Prophet as consoling herself with the reflections which we have just read: in our further consideration of which, we shall notice,

I. The address of the Jewish Church to her enemies—

Bitter in the extreme was the enmity of many surrounding nations against the Jews; far more bitter, we apprehend, than in any of them against each other. The favours conferred upon the Jewish nation by Jehovah, and the entire separation of the Jews from all other people by the ordinances of their religion, tended to call forth this enmity, and to keep it, as it were, in continual exercise. In like manner at the present day, when they have ceased to exist in their national character, and are blended with the different nations where they dwell, they are still hated, and despised above any other people upon earth. This, no doubt, is a judgment inflicted on them for their murder of their Messiah: and under their present sufferings they may well adopt the language of our text. It is the language,

1. Of deep submission—

[Great were the iniquities of the Jewish people at the time that the Prophet wrote[b]; and heavy were the judgments which God inflicted on them in Babylon on account of them. But far greater is the guilt which they have contracted in rejecting their Messiah, and in crucifying the Lord of glory. For this they have

[a] er. 15. [b] ver. 2—6.

have been punished now these 1700 years, and been made a bye-word and a hissing amongst all nations. Under these circumstances, what will be the reflections of a pious Jew? He will say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Indeed, this, we apprehend, is, in words at least, the language of the Jews at this time generally, or perhaps universally, through the world. It is on account of their sinfulness that they suppose God has not yet sent them the Messiah that was promised to them so long ago, and who, but for their wickedness, would have come to them at the appointed time: and they submit to the dispensations of God towards them from this very consideration, that they are not yet in a state fit to receive his promised mercies. This is a favourable circumstance for their future conversion: and when this submission to the Divine chastisements shall be accompanied with suitable penitence and contrition, their deliverance will be speedily vouchsafed.]

2. Of patient hope—

[As the Edomites, the Ammonites, and others, formerly exulted over Jerusalem, and rejoiced in her calamities, so at this time her enemies regard her as forsaken by her God, and doomed to interminable degradation. But the believing Jew knows that God has not forgotten to be gracious; nor so far shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure, as to be merciful to him no more. He knows, that even in the midst of all his troubles God is able to support and comfort him, and that in due season he will interpose to rescue his people from their oppressors. Hence he "encourages himself in the Lord his God;" and comforts himself with the hope, that, though his night of sorrow may be long and dreary, there is a morning of joy awaiting him, when he shall "put off his sackcloth, and gird him with gladness."]

3. Of joyful assurance—

[The Scriptures everywhere denounce the heaviest judgments on those who oppress the Jews, and who shall labour to obstruct their future restoration. Their enemies will be as incapable of offering to them any effectual opposition, as Pharaoh and his armies were of preventing the departure of their forefathers from the land of Egypt. Their enemies will indeed gather together for the purpose of preventing their re-establishment in their own land: but they will be only as "sheaves" collected into the barn "to be threshed out by men, or trodden out" by oxen[c]. Before them their adversaries will be only as sheep before the devouring lion[d]. An universal terror will seize on them, such as filled the Canaanites when Joshua invaded and subdued their land[e]. Though they appear weak and contemptible as a worm, yet

[b] Mic. iv. 11—13. [c] Mic. v. 8, 9. [d] ver. 16, 17.

yet says God to them, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff; thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel[f]." To this period the believing Jew may look forward with confidence, assured, that his present degradation shall be more than equalled by his future exaltation[g].]

But if we would improve this passage aright, we must consider,

II. The lessons it teaches to the Church of God in all ages—

The Church of Christ bears a strong resemblance to the state of the Jewish Church: it is hated and despised by an ungodly world: it is "a speckled bird; and all the birds round about are against her[h]." All who truly follow the Lord Jesus, and "walk as he walked," are "for signs and for wonders;" "nor can they live godly in Christ Jesus without suffering persecution." But from the address of the Jewish Church they may learn,

1. Submission to God's chastisements—

[From whatever quarter our trials may come, we should view the hand of God in them, and receive them as from him. We must always however distinguish between the inflictions of judicial wrath, and the chastisements of paternal love. As a Father, God chastens his most beloved children: and they can never err in saying, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." When Shimei cursed David, and Abishai desired permission to go and inflict on him the punishment he deserved, David would not suffer it, but with holy meekness submitted to the indignity, saying, "Let him alone; and let him curse: for the Lord hath bidden him[i]." It is surprising what composure this will bring into the mind amidst all the sufferings that can be inflicted on us. The consideration that they are sent by a wise and gracious God, will reconcile us to them: but the thought of their being chastisements for sin, and means of purifying us from our corruption, will make us to "kiss the rod, and to say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." Let us only see that he is "chastening us for our profit, and however we may, under the pressure of our anguish, deprecate the dispensation, we shall from our inmost souls refer ourselves to

[f] Isai. xli. 14—16.
[g] Isai. xlix. 24—26. & li. 21—23.
[h] Jer. xii. 9.
[i] 2 Sam. xvi. 7—11.

to his all-wise disposal, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done."]

2. Hope in his mercy—

[However severely God may see fit to chastise his people, there are two things which he gives them for their support; namely, a sense of his presence with them in their affliction, and the prospect of a happy issue out of it. They may, by reason of his dispensations, "sit for a time in darkness: but he will be a light unto them." They may, like St. Paul, be "troubled on every side; yet shall not be so distressed" as not to know what to do: they may be "perplexed; but shall not be in despair:" they may be "persecuted; but shall not be forsaken; and cast down, but shall not be destroyed[k]." He will "hide them, as if were, in his pavilion," or rather, as it is yet more beautifully expressed, "in the secret of his presence;" so that, though in the fire, they shall not be burned; and though in the lion's den, they shall not be hurt. Besides, when his dispensations have produced their desired effect, he, as a refiner watching over the vessels which he has put into the furnace, will take them out, and shew that they have been purified by means of it, and lost nothing in it but their dross. Under our afflictions the ungodly are ready to triumph over us, and to conclude, that God is visiting us in anger for some iniquity, which, though hidden from men, has been seen by him; but he will appear for us in due season, and "bring forth our righteousness as the noon-day." Thus he did for David, under all his persecutions from Saul: thus he did also for his only dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he raised him from the dead: and thus he will also for all who put their trust in him. If we only "humble ourselves under his mighty hand, he will in due season lift us up, to our greater comfort, and to the everlasting honour of his own name.]

3. An assured expectation of final victory—

[Even in this life the enemies of his people are often put to shame, and constrained, as Job's friends were, to confess that they had erred in judgment respecting us. But oh! what shame will seize them in the last day, when they shall see those, whom they once despised and persecuted for their religion, openly acknowledged by their Lord as good and faithful servants; and they themselves be bidden to depart from his presence, and to take their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone! Then will "their day come;" and "the righteous shall see it:" they shall sit as assessors with Christ in judgment, and shall approve of the sentence denounced against them. Such is the honour reserved for all the saints. "No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper; but every tongue that rises against them

[k] 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

them in judgment shall they condemn[l]." Sooner or later will justice be administered both to the friends and enemies of Jehovah; and that which is spoken by the prophet, be verified in all its extent; "Behold, my servants shall eat; but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice; but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit[m]." Well may this prospect compose the minds of all God's afflicted people; and well may they be contented to go on their way weeping for a season, when they have a prospect of such a harvest, and an assurance of bringing with them such sheaves into the garner of their God.]

[l] Isai. liv. 17. [m] Isai. lxv. 13, 14.

DCXXXIV.

GOD A REFUGE IN TIME OF TROUBLE.

Nahum i. 7. *The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.*

WHEN God interposed in a cloud between the camp of Israel and the camp of the Egyptians, the cloud was to those a pillar of fire, to give them light; but to these a cloud of darkness, to obstruct their way. And such is the varied aspect of Jehovah to his friends and enemies in all ages. Towards the Ninevites, who had now nearly filled up the measure of their iniquities, and forced, as it were, from Jehovah a degree of utter and everlasting excision, he is represented in terms the most awful that language could afford: "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies .... Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire; and the rocks are thrown down by him[n]." But, lest the Lord's people should apply this description of Jehovah indiscriminately to all persons of whatever character, the prophet stops abruptly, and declares, that towards his own believing people Jehovah is of a very different character; for that "he is good,

[n] ver. 2, 6.

good, and a strong hold in the day of trouble, and knoweth them that trust in him."

Let us for our comfort consider Jehovah as he is here depicted to us;

I. In the perfections of his nature—

["He is good;" every way "good;" and appears to be so in all that he has ever done. His works of *creation* were all, after an attentive survey of them by the Divine Artificer, pronounced to be "very good." In the course of so many thousands of years there never has been found one single instance in which any work of his could be improved; so perfect has been the adaptation of every part to their respective uses, and so complete the subserviency of each to the good of the whole. His works of providence come less within the sphere of human observation, because we know not all the ends that are to be accomplished by them: but of those which have been the most dark or most calamitous we have had the unanimous testimony of the best judges, that "he has done all things well;" and that however "clouds and darkness may have been round about him, justice and judgment have been the basis of his throne." Of his works of *redemption* what shall we say? In what terms can we convey any just notion of them? Verily the tongue of an archangel is incapable of expressing the goodness of God in giving his only dear Son to die for us[b]: this mystery far exceeds the comprehension of any finite intelligence: its "height and depth and length and breadth can never be explored:" suffice it to say, that the incarnation and death of the Son of God is the one subject of adoration amongst all the hosts of heaven, and will continue to be so through the countless ages of eternity[c].

But, whilst the goodness of God is readily acknowledged in reference to those who are the objects of mercy, it may be doubted in reference to those who shall be the objects of his everlasting displeasure. It may be asked, How can his punitive justice be good? I answer, If he did not maintain the rights of justice he could not be "good." Whatever ungodly men may imagine, justice is necessary in every Government: and, if an earthly monarch would be essentially defective if he suffered all the laws of the realm to be outraged and set at nought with impunity, so would Jehovah, with reverence be it spoken, act unworthily as the Moral Governor of the universe, if he made no difference between the observers of his laws, and those who violated them without remorse. His law is a transcript of his holy will; and the honour of it must be maintained, either by the observance of its precepts, or by the execution of its penalties. Besides, if the justice of God were not displayed in the punishment of sin, he would neither be revered

[b] 1 John iv. 8—10. [c] Rev. v. 12—14.

revered in heaven, nor feared on earth. In heaven, his justice and holiness and truth would be altogether darkened, and the radiance of all his other perfections obscured: and on earth, Satan would retain an undisputed sway over the hearts of men.

In every view therefore we must say, not only that God is good, but that his goodness, no less than "his greatness, is unsearchable."]

We have a further insight given us into the character of God,

II. In the provisions of his covenant—

[Sin has brought misery along with it: and since the first introduction of sin into the world, "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." But God has entered into covenant with his only Dear Son as our Head and Representative; and has made over to us himself as our God, at the same time that he takes us to himself as his people. In the day of trouble we feel, that none but God can afford us any effectual help: and he engages at that season to be a very present help unto us. Whatever our affliction be, we may go to him with it, and find him "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall [d]." What a strong-hold he is we see in the instance of Hezekiah, when surrounded by the Assyrian army, whom, according to all human appearance, it was impossible for him to withstand: one assurance of protection from Jehovah enabled that holy prince to despise all the menaces of his blaspheming adversary, and to rest as secure and as composed as if there had been no danger at hand [e].

But if in temporal troubles God is such a Refuge, much more is he when the soul is oppressed with a sense of sin. Hear what he speaks to us by his beloved Son: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yes: our adorable Saviour was fitly represented to us by the cities of refuge, which were open day and night to the manslayer, and which afforded him perfect security from the pursuer of blood, the very instant he entered within their gates. Such a city is the Lord Jesus, "whose name is a strong tower, to which the righteous runneth and is safe." Has he not himself said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?" Let the afflicted sinner go to him, and he shall find that this "man," this God-man, "will be to him as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land [f]." Verily, "He will save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him."]

We shall have a yet deeper insight into his character, if we view him,

III. In the dispensations of his grace—

["He

[d] Isai. xxv. 4. [e] Isai. xxxvii. 21—23. [f] Isai. xxxii. 2.

["He knoweth those who trust in him;" not merely as distinguishing them from others, but as feeling towards them the most affectionate regard. (In this sense the word "knoweth" is frequently used[g].) He views them with the tenderest sympathy and compassion, being "touched with a feeling of all their infirmities[h]," and being "himself afflicted in all their afflictions[i]." Of his people, when suffering under their Egyptian task-masters, he said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for "*I know their sorrows*[k]." And the same tender regard is shewn by him to a solitary individual as to a whole nation: for David says, "When my spirit was overwhelmed, thou knewest my path[l];" and again, "Thou hast known my soul in adversities[m]." The act of trusting in God is itself so pleasing and acceptable in his sight, that there is not any thing which he will not do for one who looks to him in such a frame[n]. So abundantly will he communicate to such an one the riches of his grace, that he will make his soul like a well-watered garden, filled with the richest fruits, suited to every season of the year[o]. Whatever enemies may assault him, God will "keep his soul in perfect peace[p]," and make him even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever[q]."]

What IMPROVEMENT shall we make of this subject? I answer,

1. "Acquaint yourselves with God"—

[Study the character of God as drawn in the Holy Scriptures. Some think of him as a God all mercy; and others, as clothed only in the terrors of inexorable justice. But the true character of God is, that he is "a just God and a Saviour." In the Lord Jesus Christ this union of justice and mercy is fully displayed. Once view him as dying, rising, reigning for sinful man, and then all the description given of God in our text will be seen in its true light, and all the brightness of the Godhead irradiate your souls.]

2. Glorify him as God—

[As far as we know God, even though it be only in the notices which he has given us of himself in the works of creation, we ought to "glorify him as God[r]." How much more then ought we to do so, when all his glory is made to shine before us in the face of Jesus Christ! How should we love him, serve him, trust in him, and delight ourselves in him! Oh, Beloved, let your hearts ascend to him, and your souls be devoted to him, as the occasion demands. Is he "good?" praise him for his goodness. Is

[g] Ps. i. 6. [h] Heb. iv. 15. [i] Isai. lxiii. 9. [k] Exod. iii. 7.
[l] Ps. cxlii. 3. [m] Ps. xxxi. 7. [n] Ps. xxxi. 19. [o] Jer. xvii. 7, 8.
[p] Isai. xxvi. 3. [q] Ps. cxxv. 1. [r] Rom. i. 21.

Is he "a strong-hold?" flee to him, and dwell continually in him. Does he "know those who trust in him?" let him have joy over you as monuments of his grace, and delight in you as heirs of his glory[s]. In a word, live but for him; and as he has "bought you with a price, see that ye glorify him with your bodies and your spirits, which are his[t]."

[s] Zeph. iii. 17. [t] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

DCXXXV.

THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF GOD'S MERCIES*.

Nahum i. 15. *Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows.*

IN the writings of the Prophets there is an abruptness of style, which often renders them intricate, and almost unintelligible. The rapidity of their transitions from one person to another, from one period to another, and from one subject to another, tends to bewilder the mind, and operates as a discouragement to us, when we endeavour to investigate and comprehend their meaning. But when we are on our guard respecting this, we shall often discover beauties that will amply repay the labour of investigation, and shall be led to admire those passages, which at first sight appeared to be involved in impenetrable obscurity.

The subject of the prophecy before us is the destruction of Sennacherib's army, as a prelude to the overthrow of the Assyrian empire, of which Nineveh was the capital. The prophet begins this chapter with expatiating in general terms on the power and vindictive justice of Jehovah[a]. He then speaks of these perfections with a more express reference to his main point[b]. After that, he proceeds to address himself to Nineveh, from whence that "wicked counsellor," Sennacherib, should come[c]. Then, in Jehovah's name, he addresses himself to the Jewish nation, to certify them, that, however greatly this formidable enemy should harass and distress them, they

* Thanksgiving Sermon for *Peace*.

[a] ver. 2—7. [b] ver. 8—10. [c] ver. 11.

they should be freed from his yoke[d]. Then he addresses more immediately Sennacherib himself, and declares that he, his family, and his idols, should be signally and entirely cut off[e]. Lastly, beholding, as it were, his prophecy already accomplished, he points to the Messenger hastening over the mountains to announce the glad tidings: and he calls upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem to resume their wonted occupations, and especially their religious ordinances, in humble acknowledgment of the Divine goodness, and with a faithful regard to those vows which they had made in the day of their calamity[f].

The affinity between this subject, and that which calls for our attention this day, will more fully appear, while we consider,

I. The tidings which are announced to us this day—

These certainly relate, in the first instance, to Hezekiah's deliverance by the destruction of Sennacherib's army—

[This was a great deliverance, wrought by God himself through the ministry of an angel[g]. And it may well serve to illustrate the blessings we this day commemorate[h] — — —]

But they relate also to the deliverance of mankind from sin and death through the intervention of the Lord Jesus—

[The deliverances vouchsafed to the Jews, are constantly represented in Scripture as typical of the great work of Redemption: and the very expressions in the text are used by Isaiah with a more direct reference to that event[i]: Nor is this idea founded in conjecture; for St. Paul, quoting the words of both the prophets, applies them directly to the proclaiming of salvation to the Gentile world[k]. If then the prophet mingled these two events, well may we do so too; and from contemplating the mercies vouchsafed

[d] ver. 12, 13. [e] ver. 14. [f] ver. 15. [g] Isai. xxxvii. 36.

[h] If it be the Restoration of *Peace*, the parallel must be drawn between the dangers to which Jerusalem, and our nation, had been exposed. And, if there have been any signal interpositions of the Deity in favour of our land, the mention of them will mark the parallel more strongly. If it be *the Restoration of King Charles the Second*, the blessings of Hezekiah's government, and the renewal of the established ordinances of religion, must rather be adverted to as the ground of the parallel.

[i] Isai. lii. 7. [k] Rom. x. 13—15.

safed to us in a temporal view, take occasion to reflect on the infinitely richer mercies which we obtain through Christ[l] — — —]

We are at no loss how to improve these tidings, since the prophet himself suggests,

II. The duties resulting from them—

In an encouraging yet monitory strain, he exhorts us to,

1. A devout acknowledgment of the mercies received—

[The way to Jerusalem having been blocked up by the besieging army, the prophet tells the people, that now they may have free access to the Temple, and come up at the appointed seasons to their solemn feasts. And should not *we* also now avail ourselves of the opportunities which are afforded us, and wait upon God without distraction[m]? We should at least spend this day, not in mere carnal mirth, but in solemn feasting before God, even in spiritual, and more appropriate joy.

The remembrance of the work of Redemption more especially should kindle in our hearts a sacred flame of gratitude and thanksgiving, and should stimulate us to a more strict observance of the Sabbath, which, in commemoration of it, was made to supersede the original Sabbath, and was designated by that honourable appellation, The Lord's Day.]

2. A conscientious performance of the vows we have made.

[It is most probable, that many, during the siege of Jerusalem, would make vows to God, as the Jews from the beginning had been in the habit of doing under their calamities. Nor can we doubt but that many of ourselves, in seasons of sickness or trouble, have purposed, and perhaps vowed, to change the course of our lives, if we were delivered from the distresses which we either felt or feared. At this time in particular we have been making vows, which we are bound to perform[n]. But, alas! if we compare

[l] Here the destruction of our spiritual enemies by Christ, "the *Angel* of the Covenant," may be announced, as joyful tidings to those who are "*shut up* under the Law," *the wretched expectants of death* and judgment.

[m] Here, if the king's restoration be the subject of thanksgiving, reference may be made to the interruption of the established worship during the usurpation, and the danger of its entire abolition afterwards, during the time of the Revolution.

[n] Such vows are constantly offered to God, in the forms of prayer for the 29th of May, and the fast-days; and they may here be quoted from the one or other of those forms, as the occasion requires; and may be pressed on the conscience as obligatory at this time.

pare our petitions in the midst of trouble, with our lives when delivered from trouble, what an awful contrast does there appear! Let it not, however, be so on this occasion; but let us remember the vows that are upon us; for "better were it never to vow at all, than to vow and not pay[o]."]

We conclude then with an ADDRESS, both inspired and uttered by God himself; "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; Oh Israel, and I will testify against thee! Offer unto God *thanksgiving*, and pay thy *vows* unto the Most High[p]."

[o] Eccl. v. 4, 5. [p] Ps. l. 7, 14.

DCXXXVI.

OUR DUTY IN REFERENCE TO THE PROMISES.

Hab. ii. 3. *The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry.*

AS there is no one so secure, but he may fall; so there is no one in so low and afflicted a condition, but God may have mercy in reserve for him. It has pleased God on many occasions to suffer his people to be reduced to the very last extremity before he interposed for them, in order that his interposition for them might be more visible, and produce in their minds livelier sensations of joy and gratitude. The prophet, having foretold the total destruction of his country by the Chaldean armies, was greatly grieved at the prospect of such extensive and dreadful calamities. He looked therefore to God, to know whether there were any alleviating circumstances which might console the people in their troubles; and he was favoured with a vision of their future deliverance from Babylon; and was ordered to write it down in terms so plain, that the most inattentive or superficial observer could not but understand them: but as the promise had respect to a distant period of time, he was told to bid them wait for its accomplishment, in a full assurance that they should not ultimately be disappointed.

But we must not confine the promise to this subject:

ject: for in the Epistle to the Hebrews this promise is quoted in a general manner, as applicable to all the distresses with which the Lord's people are tried[a]. The Lord himself stands engaged for their support and deliverance; and he enjoins them to wait his appointed time, in a certain expectation that he will in due season fulfil his word.

We propose then to shew,

I. The certainty of the promises—

There is a time fixed in the Divine counsels for the accomplishment of every promise—

[The promises of God often have respect to a very distant period: yet that period is fixed; nor can it be either accelerated or delayed. The time for Christ's incarnation, though not revealed from the beginning, was appointed of God from eternity. Thousands of years rolled on before the period arrived; but at the time when, according to Daniel's prophecy, the Messiah's advent was generally expected, he came[b]. The time for the detaining of Abraham's descendants was fixed, even to a single day: and the accuracy with which the promise was fulfilled, is noted by the historian as a circumstance worthy of most attentive observation; "It came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, *even the self-same day it came to pass*, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord[c]." The same remark also extends to every blessing which God has determined to confer upon his people: nor can they use a better plea on behalf of themselves or of the Church at large, than that which David urges, "Arise and have mercy upon Zion; for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come[d]."]

When that period is arrived, the promise, how improbable soever it may appear, shall be fulfilled—

[Nothing could be more unlikely, according to human apprehensions, than the deliverance foretold in the text: yet at the appointed time the Chaldeans were subdued by the Medes and Persians, and the Jews were liberated by the very man who had been foretold by name long before he had any existence in the world. The promise made to Abraham and Sarah was delayed, till the accomplishment of it, according to the course of nature, seemed impossible: yet it was not suffered to fall to the ground; in due time it received its completion, and gave a demonstration, that God was true to his word. Thus when God delays to give peace

[a] Heb. x. 37.
[b] Dan. ix. 25, 26. Luke ii. 38.
[c] Exod. xii. 40—42.
[d] Ps. cii. 13.

peace to the contrite, and victory to those who are conflicting with sin, we must not imagine that he has forgotten to be gracious, but that the time for the performance of his promise is not fully come. He has said, that "he will give his people the blessing of peace[e]," and that "sin shall not have dominion over them[f];" and he will "not suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail." "His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure[g]."]

Being assured then of the stability of his promises, let us consider,

II. Our duty with respect to them—

As "we know not the times or seasons which the Father has reserved in his own power," it becomes us to wait,

1. In humility—

[We can claim nothing at the hands of God. If he were to deal with us as he did with the fallen angels, we should have no more than our desert. The most distant hope of obtaining mercy is a marvellous favour conferred upon us. We should therefore lie low before him, as conscious of our utter unworthiness. We should implore mercy, only for the sake of that adorable Saviour who died for us. And we should cheerfully leave to God the time, the manner, the degree, in which he will shew mercy towards us.]

2. In faith—

[We must "not stagger at any of the promises[h]" on account of the greatness of them, or of our own unworthiness. We should remember who it is that promises; how sovereign he is in the distribution of his favours, and how mighty to fulfil his word. It is true, a promise of pardon to such guilty wretches, and of everlasting happiness to those who deserved nothing but misery, appears great and incredible: but he has given us his only dear Son; and will he not with him also freely give us all things? Let us not then be requiring signs to confirm our faith[i], but believe that it shall be even as God has said unto us[k].]

3. In patience—

[If God should defer granting our requests till the latest moment of our lives, we should wait contentedly upon him: his blessing, if given at the expiration of a thousand years, would amply repay us for all our solicitude and suspense. Let us consider how long he has called, and we have refused to answer; and shall we be impatient if he delay to answer us? We exercise patience in hopes

[e] Ps. xxix. 11. [f] Rom. vi. 14. [g] Isai. xlvi. 10.
[h] Rom. iv. 20. [i] Judg. vi. 36—40. [k] Acts xxvii. 25.

hopes of obtaining in due season the fruits of the earth[l]: let us do the same in hopes of that grace which shall supply all our wants, and satisfy all our desires[m].]

INFER,

1. How attentive should we be to the promises which God has made us!

[There is not a situation in which we can be, wherein we have not many promises suited to our necessities. Should we not then treasure them up in our minds? Should we not plead them at a throne of grace? Should they not be to us "a light shining in a dark place?" Let us study the word of God with an especial view to the promises; for it is by them that we are to be "made partakers of a divine nature[n]," and by them to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit[o]."]

2. How ashamed should we be of ever yielding to unbelief!

[The office of faith is, to give to things invisible and future a present and visible existence. It was by faith that Abraham was assured that Isaac, after he should have been slain and reduced to ashes, would be restored to life; yea, he was as much assured of it, as if he had seen the very transaction pass before his eyes. This honoured God, as a God of truth. But unbelief dishonours him in the highest degree: it says, in fact, that "the vision will lie." But what ground have we for such a suspicion? When *did* God falsify any one of his promises[p]? To guard against our unbelief, he has confirmed his promise with an oath[q]: and shall *we* still question his veracity? O blush, ye unbelieving people, who are doubting whether he will receive you to mercy, or supply all your need! Trust in him with unshaken affiance; and you shall find Him "faithful who hath promised."]

3. How awful is the state of those, who, instead of being interested in the promises, are obnoxious to the threatenings!

[Every word of God is equally true, and equally certain of accomplishment. The threatening that the whole world should be destroyed by a deluge, was executed, notwithstanding the scoffs of unbelievers: and every thing which he has spoken against sin and sinners shall be fulfilled in due season[r]. His vengeance is delayed in mercy; but it shall surely come at last[s]. Let the impenitent and unbelieving consider this, and "flee for refuge to the hope set before them."]

[l] Jam. v. 7, 8.
[m] Heb. x. 36.
[n] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[o] 2 Cor. vii. 1.
[p] Josh. xxiii. 14.
[q] Heb. vi. 17, 18.
[r] 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4, 8, 9.
[s] 2 Tim. ii. 12, 13.

DCXXXVII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S BOAST.

Hab. iii. 17, 18. *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom; neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

A CHRISTIAN will be distinguished from others, whatever be his situation in life; but the more trying and afflictive his condition be, the more will he cause his light to shine before men, and demonstrate the excellence of the principles he has embraced. The prophet's resolution, in the prospect of the Babylonish invasion and of the calamities consequent upon it, affords a just picture of every child of God: for though all do not possess the same attainments, all determine through grace to make God the exclusive object of their joy and triumph. Taking then the text as expressive of the feelings of all God's people, we shall notice,

I. The Christian's boast—

1. The Christian is not exempt from the common calamities of life: but though he partakes of the troubles in which others are involved, he feels supports with which others are wholly unacquainted—

1. He views God as his God and Saviour—

[The Christian contemplates God as the Creator and Governor of the universe, but more especially as the Saviour of sinful man. He admires the stupendous method which God has devised for the salvation of sinners through the blood and righteousness of his only dear Son: but that which gives peculiar sweetness to his meditations is, that he is enabled to claim God as *his* Saviour, who *has been* already the "God of his salvation, and *is* daily his strength; and will be an effectual Saviour, making his feet like hinds' feet, and causing him to walk upon his high places[a]"———]

2. He determines, in the want of all other things, to rejoice in him—

[In possessing God, he enjoys a *suitable* good, an *all-sufficient* good, and an *everlasting* good; he has that which fully satisfies the desires of his soul[b]———which makes him regardless of all his wants or trials[c]———and which is unchangeable, both

[a] ver. 19. [b] Ps. iv. 6. [c] Ps. xlvi. 1—4.

both in its operation and existence———Hence he determines to rejoice in God, no less when bereft of all the necessaries of life, than when surrounded with a fulness of all earthly comforts.

Nor is this a vain boast: for it accords with the experience of the godly in all ages of the world[d]———]

We shall have a just view of the Christian, if we consider,

II. The insight which this gives us into his real character—

Following the clue which this passage affords us, we shall find that the Christian is,

1. An exalted character—

[His thoughts are not engrossed by the things of time and sense; he soars to heaven, and views God himself in all the perfections of his nature, and in all the wonders of his grace. Nor could he be contented to call the whole world his own: he will be satisfied with nothing but the enjoyment of God, and a well-grounded persuasion of an interest in his favour. In this respect he as much surpasses the wisest philosopher, as the philosopher excels the most illiterate clown; because they who search deepest into the works of nature are circumscribed by the creation, whereas the Christian contemplates the Creator himself. Indeed he emulates even the angels around the throne, who are represented as continually looking into the mysteries of redeeming love[e].]

2. A happy character—

[The Christian is not exempt from trials and troubles; yet is he far happier than any unregenerate man. There is not any earthly bliss of which he has not a higher relish than others, because he enjoys, not the creature only, but God in the creature. A carnal mind cannot form any estimate of the Christian's joys. To know what is meant by communion with Christ, by the witness of the Spirit, and by the love of God shed abroad in the heart, we must experience them ourselves; and without such experience we are as incapable of judging of them as a blind man is of colours, or a deaf man of sounds. No words can fully express the joy with which the Christian is sometimes favoured: it is represented as "unspeakable and glorified[f]."]

3. An independent character—

[Others, if bereft of earthly supports, are reduced to extreme distress: the Christian may be deprived of all external comforts, and still the source of his happiness will remain entire. He can even derive happiness from his afflictions; he can "rejoice in his sufferings," and "glory in his tribulations." He is independent of the

[d] Heb. x. 34. Acts v. 41. & xvi. 23—25.
[e] 1 Pet. i. 12. [f] ib. ver. 8.

the whole world: none can greatly add to his happiness, or materially detract from it. In the fulness of earthly blessings he enjoys *God in all;* and in the absence of them he enjoys *all in God*[f].]

ADDRESS,

1. The careful Christian—

[God would "have you without carefulness[g]:" he commands you to "be careful for nothing[h]:" and four times in the space of a few verses does our Lord repeat the command, "Take no thought," that is, no anxious thought, about any earthly thing whatever[i]." O ye who are "careful and cumbered about many things," see how ye live below your privileges. Get your hearts more filled with the love of God, and the cares of this world will be dissipated as the dew before the sun[k].]

2. The timid Christian—

[Some, though dead to the world, have not that joy in God which it is their privilege to possess. They meditate too much upon their own infirmities, and too little upon the perfections and promises of their God. O Brethren, look at God as the God of salvation, as the God of *your* salvation, and you shall have your fears turned into confidence, and your sorrows into thanksgiving and the voice of melody.]

3. The confident Christian—

[If your confidence be tempered with humility and contrition, "hold it fast," and "keep the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the end." Such joy in God will recommend religion unto others, and "be the strength of your own souls." While living in this state you will be prepared for every event: you will be guarded equally against the allurements of prosperity, and the terrors of adversity. "Rejoice then evermore; rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice."]

[f] 2 Cor. vi. 10. [g] 1 Cor. vii. 32. [h] Phil iv. 6.
[i] Matt. vi. 25, 28, 31, 34. [k] Gal. vi. 14.

DCXXXVIII.

THE SECURE AND ATHEISTICAL CONDEMNED.

Zeph. i. 12. *It shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees; that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.*

SUCH was the state of the Jews for a long time previous to the Babylonish captivity, that the Prophets had little to do, but to denounce the judgments of God against them. The promises which they were inspire

inspired to utter, had respect to a different and distant period, a period for the most part yet future; shadowed forth indeed by their deliverance from Babylon, but to be realized only by their future conversion to the faith of Christ. Nevertheless, the warnings given to them are of use to the Church of God in all ages. The Christian Church at this time is in a state not very dissimilar to that of the Jews in the land of Canaan. We are externally the chosen people of God: we enjoy the ordinances of religion in their purity: and we have all the means of grace richly afforded us. But we rest in external services, as they did; and have as little of real piety as the generality of that infatuated nation. Whilst we call ourselves the people of the Lord, we differ but little from the nations that know not God. We conform in many things to customs most repugnant to true religion; and in the spirit and habit of our minds, shew, that, whatever we may retain of "the form of godliness, we are strangers to its power." The evils which God reproved amongst them, are to be found in no less degree amongst us also: and the judgments that were denounced against them shew what reason we also have to dread the displeasure of God. In confirmation of this truth, we will consider,

I. The characters here described—

Such we behold in every place; persons sunk in,

1. Carnal security—

[The metaphor by which the state of these persons is depicted exhibits it in a most striking point of view. Wine, when "settled on its lees," retains for a long time its strength and flavour, which, if it were emptied from vessel to vessel, it would soon lose. In like manner when, through a long period of ease and prosperity, persons have their natural dispositions fixed, and inveterate habits formed, they retain throughout their whole man, and manifest throughout their whole conduct, a savour of earthly things. The very habit of sin hardens them in sin; and the forbearance which God in his mercy exercises towards them, confirms in them an expectation of final impunity. This is the description which the prophet Jeremiah gives of Moab[a]; and with it agrees the testimony of David respecting the ungodly in all ages: as long as they have no changes "to awaken them from their slumber, they fear not God." How true this is, we cannot but

[a] Jer. xlviii. 11.

but see in all around us. How securely do men live in a total neglect of their everlasting concerns! They have no dread of God's displeasure; no anxieties about the future judgment; no alternations of hope and fear as arising from an examination of their state before God. Whatever God may say in his word, they regard it not: If he tell them, that "broad is the road that leadeth to destruction, and that many," even the great mass of mankind, "walk therein; but that narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it;" they account it worthy of not the least attention: they cannot believe that they are in any danger; and they hold fast their delusions with a confidence that nothing can shake.]

2. Atheistical presumption—

[Persons, the more effectually to exclude all misgivings from their minds, deny that God takes any cognizance of their state. "Tush, say they, how shall God know? is there knowledge in the Most High[b]?" They think it would be dishonouring God to conceive of him as marking all the ways of the children of men in order to a future judgment. True indeed, they hear him denounce many threatenings against the ungodly: but they will not believe that he will execute them. They hear him, too, promising many things to his humble and obedient people: but they cannot persuade themselves that he will fulfil them. They imagine that he has, as it were, "forsaken the earth[c]:" and quite contented are they that he should do so, since the very thought of his presence would disquiet them. Thus do they, in fact, "say like the fool, 'There is no God[d].'"

Not that this is the language of their *lips:* they would be ashamed to avow such sentiments as these. But it is the language of their *hearts:* "they say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good; neither will he do evil." If they believed in their hearts the promises and threatenings of God, they would manifest a suitable regard to them in their lives: but, as they neither delight themselves in the one, nor tremble at the other, they shew beyond all doubt what the secret feeling of their hearts is, and that the construction which God puts upon their conduct is true. They may be moral and decent in their outward conduct; but radically in their hearts they are "Atheists in the world[e]."]

After this view of the persons described in our text, we shall not wonder at,

II. The judgments denounced against them—

Two things God declares in the words before us;

1. That however hidden they may suppose their state to be, God will search it out—

[The Jews at the passover would search every corner of their houses

[b] Ps. lv. 19. [c] Ezek. viii. 12. [d] Ps. xiv. 1.
[e] Eph. ii. 12. See the Greek.

houses with candles, in order to find the smallest portion of leaven which might lie concealed: and God will search with candles, not Jerusalem only, but every place, yea and every heart, to find the abominations which have been just described. They may not betray themselves by any overt acts, so as to excite the attention of men: they may even exist where all the outward conduct is correct; even as the most offensive masses of corruption are hid under a whited sepulchre. But God will not be deceived by any appearances, however specious: "The darkness is no darkness with him; but the night is as clear as the day:" before him all things are naked and opened: the thoughts and intents of the heart are discerned by him: and "he will make manifest its most hidden counsels." "He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," and "weigheth the spirit" as in a balance; and will interpret as infallibly the language of the heart, as if it had been manifested by ten thousand acts. Let this be duly considered. We may deceive others; and we may deceive ourselves: but we cannot deceive our God; for "he knows the things that come into our mind, every one of them."]

2. That however innocent they may suppose their state to be, God will punish it—

[God cannot look upon persons of this description without the deepest resentment: for they place him on a level with the basest idol, whose proper character is, that "it can do neither good nor evil[f]." And how can a holy and jealous God endure this? Be it so: their wickedness is only, as it were, of a negative kind; and consists rather in a neglect of what is good, than in a perpetration of what is evil: but was this unpunished in the antediluvian world? "They ate, they drank; they planted, they builded; they married, and were given in marriage:" and, What harm, it may be asked, was there in all this? None: but the evil was, that they lived without any regard for God: and therefore God sent a deluge, and swept them all away. And so will he do with respect to those who now cast off all fear of him, and, in heart at least, banish him from the world which he has created. See in what light he views such conduct: he declares "the iniquity of it to be exceeding great[g];" and denounces against it his heaviest indignation[h]. And so far are these persons from being out of danger, that the more secure they apprehend themselves to be, the greater and more imminent their danger is. They may say, Peace and safety; but "sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape[i]:" they may sleep; but "their judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." "The sins of some are open beforehand, going before to judgment: but they that are otherwise cannot be hid[j]." It is in vain to say that they do no harm: for the unprofitable servant, no less than the

[f] Jer. x. 5. [g] Ezek. ix. 9. [h] Deut. xxix. 19, 20.
[i] 1 Thess. v. 3. [j] 1 Tim. v. 24, 25.

the openly wicked, shall be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are living in the state above described—

[I will appeal to you yourselves respecting the wickedness of your lives. Judge ye between God and your own souls. Consider yourselves but as creatures; and does it become you to live without any regard for your Creator? But view yourselves as sinners redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son; and then say, Whether a life of carnal security and atheistical presumption be such an one as your condition calls for?———Look into the Scriptures, and see whether you can find any countenance for such a life, either in the commands of God, or in the examples of his saints?———Think whether your own opinion of such a state will always remain what you now profess it to be? Do you find that any awakened soul looks back on such a life with complacency? Does it appear to him a light matter to have lived all his days as without God in the world? If you continue to harden yourselves against God, he may give you up to your own delusions, and leave you under the power of them in your dying hour: but what think you will be your views of such a life the very instant your eyes are opened on the invisible world? What will be your views of it when standing in the presence of your Judge? and what will be your views of it, when you are eating the fruit of your own ways in that place from whence there is no return, and in which your residence will be fixed to all eternity? If in your hearts you think that you will then rejoice in the retrospect of a carnal life, go on; and sleep out the little remainder of your days. But if conscience tell you, that in that day you will have far different views from those which you now profess, then awake from your slumbers, and turn unto God without delay. God has given you a candle wherewith to search yourselves; (for "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly[k]:") make use of it then with all diligence: "search and try your ways, and turn unto the Lord your God:" and doubt not but that in Christ you shall find a full and complete redemption. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light."]

2. Those who have obtained deliverance from it—

[Blessed be God, if any of you have been quickened from your death in trespasses and sins: and now beware, lest ye relapse again into your former state of atheistical supineness. It is no uncommon thing for persons to run well for a season, and then turn back again; to "begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh." But to you also will I make my appeal: Is it "a vain thing

[k] Prov. xx. 27.

thing to serve the Lord?" Will he not do good to those who seek him in sincerity and truth? Is he not, as he has said, "the Rewarder of all such?" Does he not even now impart to the soul blessings that are of more value than ten thousand worlds? Does he not answer prayer? Does he not communicate to the soul a peace that passeth all understanding? Does he not lift up the light of his countenance on the poor and needy? Does he not shed abroad his love in the heart? Does he not give the witness of his Spirit to the soul, and seal it unto the day of redemption? On the other hand, does he not hide his face when you become remiss, and leave you to feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from him?" Yes: you can testify that there is a God that ruleth in the earth: you can testify how rich his grace is, and how abundant his mercy in the Son of his love. You can testify that Christ "reveals himself to his people as he does not unto the world;" and that he dwells in them, and gives them, by the manifestations of his love, an earnest and a foretaste of their future inheritance. Go on then, living by faith upon him, and cleaving unto him with full purpose of heart; and shew to all around you what the Christian life is. Run, as in a race, for an incorruptible crown: wrestle as one that is striving against all the principalities and powers of hell: and fight manfully till all your enemies are put under your feet. So shall you be living witnesses for God in this world, and partakers of all his blessedness in the world to come.]

DCXXXIX.

REPENTANCE URGED.

Zeph. ii. 1—3. *Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.*

IN the preceding chapter, the most dreadful judgments are denounced against the whole Jewish nation. That devoted people are represented as a sacrifice, which God himself has prepared to be devoured by their enemies, whom he has invited as guests to come and prey upon them[a]. Yet, as God afforded space for repentance to the Ninevites, notwithstanding the apparent immutability of his decree against them,

[a] Ch. i. 7.

them, so he does here to his own people the Jews. By the voice of his prophet he bids them "gather themselves together" for the purpose of national humiliation, and repent, before the threatened judgments come upon them. And, if they in their national capacity will not hear his voice, he bids the meek and contrite among them to abase themselves, that they at least may be preserved amidst the general wreck.

A similar exhortation is at all times seasonable; since at all times there are the heaviest judgments impending over the ungodly, and since by true and timely penitence they may be averted.

To analyze this passage, will be to enervate its force. I shall therefore ground upon it a general address, having respect to its main import, and prosecuting in an unartificial way its more prominent topics. Know then, that

The most dreadful judgments hang over an ungodly world—

[There is a day wherein "God will judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained, even by our Lord Jesus Christ." That day is called "the *day of wrath* and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" and "*the day of the perdition of ungodly men*[b]." But the terrors of that day who can conceive? Who can form any idea of what is meant by *that* "*wrath of God*, which is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men[c]?" Who can imagine what it is to be "cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," where "the worm" that gnaws the conscience "dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" In a word, the "power of his anger who can tell[d]?"]

To escape those judgments should be the one concern of every living man—

[There is no man who is not justly exposed to them: all are transgressors of God's holy law, and consequently obnoxious to the curse which it denounces against sin. All then, as with one heart and one mind, should unite in deprecating the displeasure of their God, and in "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them" in the Gospel———Hear this, "O people not desired:" whether through the hardness of your hearts ye are not *desired* by God, or through your ignorance of him are not *desirous* of his favour, (for the prophet's expression may be understood

[b] Rom. ii. 5. 2 Pet. iii. 7. [c] Rom. i. 18. [d] Ps. xc. 11.

stood in either way;) you should not lose an hour in embracing the proffered mercy. If once "the decree bring forth," there will be an end of all possibility of obtaining mercy to all eternity. "As the tree falls, so will it lie" for ever and ever. Oh, then let all of you "gather yourselves together," and, as the word also imports, "search yourselves," ere it be too late. For your immortal soul's sake, repent, I beseech you, without delay, "before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you."]

To those who have any measure of humility and contrition, this truth will approve itself as most unquestionable and most important—

[Prevalent as impiety is to a vast extent, there are some, I trust, "who have wrought God's judgment," and laboured in sincerity to fulfil his will. Such, it might be supposed, would be most self-confident. But the very reverse is their experience: the more observant they have been of the Lord's statutes, the more will they be humbled under a sense of their defects: they are, and ever will be, "the meek of the earth." To such then we address ourselves with the greater hope of success: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth." You have already shewn that you think God is to be feared: your very attainments, small as they may be, yet testify in your behalf that you are neither "undesirous," or "undesired." You have chosen God; and that is a proof that God has previously chosen you[e]. Relax not then your endeavours: be not contented to have run well for a season: press forward, forgetful of all that you may have attained: "never be weary in well-doing," lest you "turn back," and "your last end be worse than your beginning."]

But let your humiliation be such as God requires—

["Seek righteousness, seek meekness;" "seek righteousness" in the way wherein God has appointed it to be obtained, even by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; who, by his own obedience unto death, has brought in an everlasting righteousness for the justification of the ungodly; and by his efficacious and all-sufficient grace will "sanctify you throughout, in body, soul, and spirit." Rest not in any thing short of the full possession of Christ and all his benefits: but labour night and day, till "he is, of God, made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Particularly "seek meekness" also; for that is the grace which God most delights in: "the broken and contrite heart he will not despise;" on the contrary, he will come down from the highest heavens to testify his regard for it, and to make it his habitation[f]. If there be one grace more than another which distinguishes the more advanced Christian, it is that of humility.

[e] John xv. 16.

[f] Isai. lvii. 15.

humility. Job was a perfect man before his sufferings; but, after them, his attainments in grace were exceedingly enlarged; and then it was that he "abhorred himself in dust and ashes." Do ye also aspire after perfection in every grace; but learn most of all to "lothe yourselves," when you have the most confident hope that "God is pacified towards you[g]."]

It shall then assuredly prove effectual for the salvation of your souls—

["Repent, says the prophet, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Where the judgments are of a temporal nature, the true penitent may *hope* that God will put a difference between him and others[h]; but in reference to judgments that shall be inflicted in the eternal world, he may *be sure* of it. The sheep and the goats shall have their appropriate places assigned them; and the wheat be treasured up in the garner, whilst "the chaff is burnt up with unquenchable fire." Were there but a peradventure concerning this, it were quite sufficient to encourage our deepest penitence: but it is not a matter of uncertainty: it not only "*may be*," but *shall be:* and not the smallest grain of true wheat shall ever be lost[i]. Did Jesus, even in the days of his flesh, lose one whom the Father had given him? No: "nor will he ever suffer one to be plucked out of his hands." "Their lives are now hid with Christ in God; and therefore when He, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory[k]."]

[g] Ezek. xvi. 63. [h] Ezek. ix. 4. [i] Am. ix. 9. [k] Col. iii. 3, 4.

DCXL.

WHAT RECOMPENCE WE MAY EXPECT FOR OUR NEGLECT OF GOD.

Zeph. iii. 7, 8. *I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings. Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey.*

IN great national calamities we are apt, for the most part, to overlook the hand of God, and to trace events only to second causes, or to ascribe them to mere chance. But whatever there be either of "good or evil in the city," God must be acknowledged as "the doer of it." Moreover, in whatever he does, he has some fixed design: and to answer that design should be the labour of all his creatures. Now the general

general design of his judgments is, to awaken the inhabitants of the earth from their torpor, and to teach them righteousness: and if smaller judgments produce not this effect upon us, we may expect heavier to ensue. One very important object to be attained by cutting off the nations around Judea, and by sending the ten tribes into captivity in Assyria, was to reform his more peculiar people, the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. And, as his people were far from improving his judgments for that end, he declared, that he would visit them in a way suited to display the enormity of their guilt, and the riches of that grace which they had so abused.

In order to accommodate this subject to the present occasion, we shall consider,

I. What God has been expecting from us—

Dreadful have been the judgments which God has inflicted on the surrounding nations—

[To whatever part of Europe we direct our attention, we shall see that the different nations have, during the last twenty years, been visited with calamities of a most afflictive kind: but more particularly, the recent devastation of Russia, the destruction of its ancient capital by fire, and the total annihilation of the French army in the space of a few weeks, are events that demand particular notice at this time. Indeed, with the exception of our highly-favoured land, there is scarcely a country to which, at some period of this war, we may not in a measure apply the words preceding our text; "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant."]

And has not God been speaking to us by these great events?

[Yes, surely: he has sought to reclaim us from our evil ways: he has "said with himself, Surely thou wilt fear me; thou wilt receive instruction; so that thy dwelling shall not be cut off, howsoever I punish thee." Of us this improvement of his judgments might well be expected, not only on account of the peculiar protection which has been afforded us, but on account of the transcendent advantages which we enjoy in the knowledge of God's word, and the ministration of his Gospel[a]——— And now, I ask,

[a] Here shew particularly wherein that improvement should have consisted; and our additional obligation to it, arising from our religious privileges: v. 5.

ask, Was not this expectation reasonable? and is not that complaint which God made against his people of old, in the fullest and strictest sense applicable to us?[b] — — —]

Alas! We have reason to blush and be confounded, when we reflect,

II. How we have disappointed his expectations —

Hear the accusation of God against us; "They rose early, and corrupted all their doings"—

[There is no sin, in the commission of which we are not as eager as ever. It should almost seem that "the goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance of God, which should have led us to repentance," have produced rather the contrary effect, of lulling us to sleep in our sins. The accusation is more fully stated in a preceding verse[c]: let us consider it more minutely: let us make use of it as a light by which to search and try our ways — — — Is it not true? and is not our guilt in this view exceeding heinous?]

And is not the accusation applicable to all ranks and orders amongst us, even as it was against the Jews of old?

[We do not in general wish to speak of others: but in a view of national iniquities we are constrained to do so, especially where the Prophets lead the way. Behold then what the prophet speaks respecting the princes, the judges, the prophets, and the priests of his day[d]: we will not say that precisely the same iniquities prevail amongst those different orders in our land; but we appeal to you, whether any material change has taken place amongst the higher ranks; or whether those, whose duty it is to instruct and reform the world, have increased in activity and zeal, by any means to the extent that the occasion has called for? Alas! if we consult the records of the New Testament, and see what the Apostles preached, and how they lived, and then compare it with the lives and ministrations of the sacred order amongst us, we shall see cause to wonder that God has not already removed his candlestick from us, and left us in utter darkness — — —

And well may the misconduct of these orders be more distinctly noticed, since on them depends, in so great a degree, the state of all the other classes of society. If all Ministers would preach the Gospel with fidelity, and exemplify its holy precepts in their lives; and if our Princes and nobility would take the lead in the great work of reformation; an immense change would soon be wrought in every quarter of the land: but if, for want of their exertions, the whole land continue in its iniquities, let them not wonder that their criminality is exposed, and that the judgments reserved

[b] Isai. v. 3, 4. [c] ver. 2. [d] ver. 3, 4.

reserved for them are proportioned to the guilt which they contract.]

The disappointment of God's expectations from us leads us naturally to consider,

III. What we may expect from him—

On this part of our subject we shall be led to extremely different views, according to the interpretation which we put on the concluding words of our text. Some understand the words thus: "Ye have disappointed all my reasonable expectations; therefore expect from me the most tremendous judgments." Others justly observe, that the word "*therefore*" may properly be translated "nevertheless[e];" and that the sense is, "Ye have disappointed all my reasonable expectations; *nevertheless* that shall not induce me to alter my gracious purposes towards Jews and Gentiles, whom I will unite under one head, and sanctify as my peculiar people." In confirmation of this latter sense, we must say, that this is the very way in which God often introduces his most glorious promises[f]; and that the two verses following our text seem to require it. But as we cannot certainly determine which of the senses is the right, we include both; and shew what we may expect from God,

1. In a way of judgment—

[Often does God denounce especial vengeance against those who have abused his mercies[g]: and well indeed may we expect to have it executed upon us: well may we be constrained to drink the dregs of that cup which has been put into the hands of the surrounding nations. And how fearful will be our state, if "God pour upon us his indignation, even all his fierce anger!" Let us not indulge in presumptuous security. Who that had been told a few years ago that either the ancient capital of the Russian empire, or that of the British empire, would before this be certainly destroyed by fire, would have imagined on which the lot should fall? O let us tremble for ourselves, and labour to fulfil the gracious designs of God, before his wrath come upon us to the uttermost — — —]

2. In a way of mercy—

[The Jews have an idea that the Messiah's advent was deferred on account of the wickedness of their nation: but it was not deferred;

[e] That is evidently the true sense of the word in Mic. v. 2, 3.

[f] Isai. xliii. 22—26. & lvii. 16, 17. & Hab. ii. 12—14.

[g] Isai. v. 5, 6. Jer. v. 5, 6.

ferred; nor shall any thing prevent the final execution of God's promises, in the restoration of the Jews, and the bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles[h]——— No: we look for those events with full assurance that they shall be accomplished in due season. It is probable, indeed, that great calamities will precede those events[i]; and there is great reason to hope, that the calamities of the present day are preparing the way for them. May God hasten forward that glorious period! and then, grievous as have been the distresses of the world for so many years, we shall not think we have sustained one too much, if it has been accessary in any measure to the promotion of so blessed an end.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us now drop all idea of *national* concerns, and come to those which are purely *personal*. Let us call to mind our *personal* transgressions, and reflect upon the *personal* judgments or mercies that await us——— And may God reap the fruit of all his kindness; and Christ "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied!"]

[h] ver. 9, 10. [i] Luke xxi. 25—28.

DCXLI.

THE POOR LIVING BY FAITH.

Zeph. iii. 12. *I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people; and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.*

THE Lord's people have in every age been a mere remnant, in comparison of the great mass of mankind. At the time of the Deluge they were confined to Noah and his family. In the Patriarchal age, from the call of Abraham to the descent of his posterity into Egypt, they were still a very "little flock:" and though they afterwards in appearance multiplied, and became a great nation, yet "they were not all Israel who were of Israel:" there was still but a small portion of that people who truly loved and served God; and even in the Apostolic age St. Paul tells us, that they were then only "a remnant according to the election of grace." Moreover this remnant has for the most part been of the description mentioned in our text, persons destitute of any thing whereon to found a carnal confidence, and necessitated to confide solely in their God. At the period referred to in the preceding context they will cease to bear the character of a remnant, seeing that they will fill the face of the whole earth, and compre-

comprehend in their number all the kings and princes of the world[a]: but till that period they will be characterized as "an afflicted and poor people, who shall trust in the name of the Lord."

In further speaking of them, we shall be led to notice,

I. Their low condition—

The description here given of them is for the most part verified in,

1. Their relative and temporal state—

[Riches and poverty are relative terms; and, when viewed in a large and comprehensive sense, will serve to draw a broad line between the different classes of society. It is from the lower of these classes that the Lord's people are most generally taken. Others are not excluded; on the contrary, *some* of the opposite class will always be found among them: but "not *many* great, not *many* mighty, not *many* noble, are called: God has chosen rather the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, that no flesh should glory in his presence[b]." So evident has this been in all ages of the Church, that St. James appeals to his brethren all the world over in confirmation of the fact: "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom[c]?" Indeed to this circumstance our Lord himself referred as confirming the truth of his Messiahship, that "to the poor the Gospel was preached[d]:" and they received his word, and "heard him gladly," whilst the Scribes and Pharisees almost universally rejected him.

Affliction too is not unfrequently associated with poverty in the Lord's people: for it is rarely that any will turn truly unto the Lord, till affliction of some kind or other has prepared their hearts, and "plowed up, as it were, the fallow ground" for the reception of the heavenly seed. Almost all have occasion to acknowledge, with the Psalmist, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray." The minds of men are so carnal and worldly, that they will scarcely admit a serious thought, till they are made to feel, like the Prodigal in the parable, the insufficiency of earthly things to comfort them in the hour of trouble. Then they awake, as it were, out of a dream; and begin to say, "I will go unto my Father, in whose house there is bread enough and to spare."]

2. Their personal and spiritual state—

[In this sense every Child of God without exception answers to the character in our text. There was once a time when all of them thought that they were "rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing;" but, when the Lord opened the eyes of their understanding, they were made sensible that they were "wretched,

[a] ver. 9. [b] 1 Cor. i. 26—29. [c] Jam. ii. 5. [d] Matt. xi. 5.

"wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." From that time they became "poor in spirit," and "go on their way weeping" for all their past iniquities and abominations. Now they have on their hearts a load too heavy for them to bear; and under the pressure of it they go to that adorable Saviour, who has invited to him the weary and heavy-laden, and who alone is capable of giving them rest. Such are the persons to whom alone the Gospel is acceptable[e], or can ever be preached with full effect: "the whole need not a physician:" it is the sick alone that desire his aid, or will receive his prescriptions. And such are the Lord's people: they feel themselves utterly destitute of all wisdom, goodness, and strength; and they are content to receive these blessings out of the fulness that is in Christ Jesus.]

3. Their state to which they are reduced by the Gospel—

[In former ages, long before the coming of Christ, the Lord's people were persecuted by an ungodly world. Thousands, "of whom," the Apostle says, "the world was not worthy, had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented[f]." Of the saints under the Gospel dispensation it is needless to speak: the Acts of the Apostles amply testify, as the Epistles do also, that the followers of Christ have been treated as "the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things;" and experience proves that they are so regarded even to this day. The increase of civilization, and the protection afforded by human laws, prevent the same cruelties from being exercised towards them as in days of old: but it is as true at this day as at any period of the world, that "he who departeth from evil maketh himself a prey;" and that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." True, we are not dragged to the stake as formerly: but is it nothing to be hated, and despised of all men, and to be made a butt for impiety and profaneness to expend their arrows upon? Is it nothing too to have one's "greatest foes amongst one's own household." Yet so shall every man, who will be faithful to his God, find it in his own experience: he shall surely have some cross to bear; and be himself a witness, that the Lord's servants are "a poor and afflicted people."]

Nevertheless they need not be discouraged, if only they will improve,

II. Their exalted privilege—

"The name of the Lord is to them a strong tower, to

[e] Isai. xiv. 32. [f] Heb. xi. 36—38.

to which they may run and be safe." It is their privilege to trust in,

1. His mercy to pardon—

[Whatever their former sins may have been, their Lord and Saviour is ready to forgive them, and to blot them all out as a morning cloud. Even though they may have been "red like crimson, they, through the virtue of his blood, shall be made white as snow." Know then your privilege in this respect: let no sense of guilt keep you from him: limit not his tender mercies: look at those whom he received in the days of his flesh: and be assured that he is still as gracious as ever; and that "those who come to him he will in no wise cast out." "Though your sins may have abounded, his grace shall much more abound;" and he will say to you, as he did to a notorious sinner of old, "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee."]

2. His power to uphold—

[Great may be your conflicts with sin and Satan; but great shall be the succour which you shall derive from your living Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will "strengthen you with might by his Spirit in your inner man:" and "as your day is, so shall also your strength be." In you shall that sweet promise be verified, "The foot shall tread down its adversaries, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy[g]." However formidable then your enemies may appear, remember that "your Redeemer also is mighty;" and that "whilst God is for you, none can with any effect be against you."]

3. His love to overrule every thing for good—

[God has promised to his people that "all things shall work together for their good." How the good shall be elicited from the evil, they frequently have no idea at the time. But God knows how to accomplish his own gracious purposes by the very means which his enemies are using to defeat them. The history of Joseph, and the book of Esther, draw aside the veil, and shew us how God is acting at this very hour. The instances that occur are invisible to mortal eyes, as they were in the histories referred to: but the plot is going forward; and in due time millions of other instances will be seen, no less real, and no less wonderful than they. It is the privilege of God's people to "commit their ways entirely to him," and he engages that he "will bring to pass" what shall eventually be for their greatest good.]

4. His faithfulness to keep them, even to the end—

[Never does he forsake his poor and afflicted people. He has promised them, "I will never leave thee; I will never, never forsake thee." We may be confident, as the Apostle was, that "where

[g] Isai. xxvi. 6.

"where God has begun a good work, he will carry it on, and perfect it till the day of Christ." This is assured to them by covenant and by oath, that they may have the stronger consolation [i]. Not that a reliance on their Saviour is to supersede their own efforts, but rather to encourage them; seeing that it is by their own efforts he will work: but still it is their privilege to anticipate the issue of their conflicts with confidence; and to rest assured, that "nothing shall ever separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus their Lord."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let it not be a grief to any that they are "afflicted and poor"—

[Such the Saviour himself was; "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And shall it be a grief to any to be made like unto Him?———Besides, it is by our own utter destitution of all good, that the power and grace of Christ will be magnified. And shall we not thankfully acquiesce in any thing that glorifies him? The apostle Paul "took pleasure in his infirmities and distresses," because "the power of Christ was made perfect, and manifested to be perfect, by his weakness [k]:" and this is the proper disposition for us all. Be contented to be nothing; that "Christ may be all in all."]

2. Let the religion of the heart be more and more cultivated—

[We are far from undervaluing religious *acts*: they are excellent, as fruits of the Spirit, and as evidences of a lively faith. But it is the religion of *the heart* that must be our first concern; since, till the tree is made good, it is in vain to hope for any good fruit to spring from it. The grand characteristic feature of the Lord's people is, that "they trust in his name." Now trust is altogether an act of the soul; an act invisible to mortal eyes. It realizes the presence of Jehovah, and his government of the whole universe. It rests on him: it reposes all its hopes on his agency; and thus honours him, far beyond all other exercises either of the mind or body. This then is to be the habit of our minds: and "the whole life which we now live in the flesh, we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us."]

[i] Heb. vi. 17—19. [k] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

DCXLII.

CONSIDERATION OF OUR WAYS ENFORCED.

Haggai i. 2—5, 12. *Thus speaketh the Lord of Hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's*

Lord's House should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this House lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Consider your ways. ---Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high-priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, (as the Lord their God had sent him,) and the people did fear before the Lord.

ALL the preceding prophets prophesied either before or during the Babylonish captivity: but Haggai, and the two who follow him, prophesied after the return of the Jews from Babylon. What space of time Haggai continued to prophesy, we know not: but all his prophecies which are come down to us were delivered in the short space of two months. His principal office, in which he was soon joined by the prophet Zechariah, seems to have been to stir up the Jews to rebuild their Temple, and to assure them, that however inferior to the former Temple it might be in their eyes, it should in reality far surpass that in glory. In reference to their neglect, he reproves them with just severity; and shews them, that already had God inflicted his judgments on them on account of it; but assures them at the same time, that, if they will re-commence and prosecute the work with diligence, his blessing shall be visibly poured out upon them[a].

In discoursing on this subject, we will notice,

I. The conduct reproved—

They had begun to build the Temple about sixteen years before; but having been stopped by an edict from Artaxerxes, they had desisted, and had attended only to their own personal accommodations. But the Persian monarch was now dead; and they ought therefore to have availed themselves of that circumstance, and to have proceeded with the work. A whole year had elapsed, and they had not even thought of resuming the pious labour: they were even well pleased with the obstacle that had been put in their

[a] Ch. ii. 15—19.

their way; and satisfied their consciences with saying, that "the Lord's time for rebuilding the Temple was not yet come." They did not say that they would never execute that work; but they justified their present neglect of it by this vain excuse.

Now this is precisely what we ourselves are prone to do,

1. In reference to God's temple which is to be erected in the world—

[The Church is his temple, "the habitation of God through the Spirit;" and on the whole face of the globe is it one day to be erected. But when we call on persons to arise and work, they answer, "The Lord's time is not come." They see many difficulties to be surmounted; and, instead of regarding them as occasions only for calling forth their zeal, they consider them as indications that God does not require the work itself to be performed; thus making the dispensations of his providence a cloke for their own supineness. In reference to the conversion of the Jews in particular, this excuse is offered by many; and offered with as much confidence, as if they were acquainted with all the counsels of the Deity, and knew exactly all the times and the seasons which the Father has reserved in his own power. But this excuse of theirs is nothing more nor less than a plea for inactivity, and an acknowledgment that they are altogether indisposed for the exertions which they are called to make in this sacred cause.]

2. In reference to the temple which is to be erected in our own hearts—

[Believers are "Temples of the Holy Ghost:" Christ dwells in their hearts by faith: "the Father too dwelleth in them, and they in him:" and such temples all of us are called to be. But when persons of every description are urged to consecrate themselves entirely to the service of their God, they reply, as with one consent, "The time is not come." They will not say, "No; God never shall dwell in me;" but, acknowledging it to be their duty to surrender up themselves to him, they think themselves excused from it by some providential impediment: one is too young to engage in such holy services as yet: another is too much immersed in business to afford the time: another is for the present afraid of offending some earthly superior: and thus, like the persons invited to the wedding in the Gospel, they all, on some frivolous pretext or other, unite in saying, "I pray thee have me excused."]

But how vain such excuses are, may be seen by,

II. The reproof administered—

This

This consists of two parts; an expostulatory appeal, and a solemn admonition: "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this House lie waste? Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways."

We then in like manner make our appeal to you—

[Have you time for yourselves, and not for God? for your bodies, and not for your souls? for the affairs of this short transitory life, and not for those of eternity? Is it thus that ye have been taught of God; to "seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness *last?*" and to "mind your own things only, and not the things of Jesus Christ[b]?" Was this a just return from those who had been delivered from their captivity in Babylon? and, if not from them, is it from you, who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son from a bondage infinitely more tremendous, a bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell? Judge ye, whether it becomes you to be seeking your own carnal ease, interest, and pleasure; and to be neglecting the work of God, and the welfare of your immortal souls? Only let conscience deliver an unbiassed testimony, and we consent that you shall be judges in your own cause.]

To you also we offer this salutary admonition—

["Consider your ways." Twice is this repeated by the prophet[c]: and repeatedly should it be urged on all who are guilty of the conduct before described.

"Consider your ways," *in order to your humiliation.* Look back, and see, how highly criminal they have been. The more fully you call them to remembrance, and the more distinctly you view them with all their several aggravations, the more you will see cause to humble yourselves before God in dust and ashes———

"Consider your ways," *in order that you may see what indignation they have already excited in the bosom of an avenging God.* The Jews were referred to the judgments which God in his providence had inflicted on account of their sin, as proofs of his heavy displeasure[d]: and, if we could with equal certainty be informed of the reasons of those chastisements which God from time to time has inflicted on us, either publickly in common with the whole land, or privately in our several persons and families, there can be no doubt but that we should find our sins to have been the root and ground of all. But without such infallible information from above, we should not presume to interpret the dispensations of Providence in this way, except in our own particular case; and even then we should do it with great caution and diffidence. Nevertheless in many instances we may clearly

[b] Phil. ii. 21. [c] ver. 5, 7. [d] ver. 9—11.

clearly read our sin in our punishment. We have preferred the cares and pleasures of the world; and we have been given over to a worldly mind: we have been impenitent, and have been delivered up to hardness of heart: we have disregarded the gracious visits of our God; and he has withdrawn himself from us altogether: he has left us to "be filled with our own devices, and to eat of the fruit of our own ways."

Once more; Consider your ways, *in order to the amending of them in future.* To this the Jews were called[e]; and to this we also are called: and without this, all consideration of our ways would be to no purpose———Determine then, with David, "not to give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eye-lids, till your hearts are become a temple for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob[f]."]

Happy the prophet who executed his office with such fidelity! and happy the people who were favoured with such a monitor! May our testimony also correspond with his in,

III. The effect produced—

Great and instantaneous was the change wrought on their minds—

["The remnant of the people," from the highest to the lowest, all obeyed the voice of the Lord, and of the prophet whom he had sent unto them. They all began to "fear the Lord," and in little more than three weeks actually commenced the work to which they were called[g]. O that such a change also might be wrought in *us!* O that our Governors also, both in Church and State, might obey the call; and that all classes of the community would begin, as with one heart and one mind, to serve the Lord; first, to get their whole souls sanctified unto the Lord; and then, to promote his glory throughout the world!———]

Great also was the encouragement instantly afforded them by God himself—

[No sooner did they evince a desire to comply with God's command, than God commissioned his prophet to say to them, "I am with you, saith the Lord[h]." And no sooner did they set about the work, than God called them to notice the very day, and pledged himself from that hour to bless them[i]. Yea, even the very day of their change did God himself register, not only in the book of his remembrance in heaven, but in the written records of his prophet on earth: "In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king[k]," O that this present

[e] Ch. ii. 4. [f] Ps. cxxxii. 2—5. [g] ver. 14.
[h] ver. 13 [i] See Note [s]. [k] ver. 15.

sent year of our King might be so marked! yea, that this very day might be so registered, as the season of a remarkable conversion of our souls to God! Be assured, that, if only one amongst us should now begin to obey his call, and to turn from earthly vanities to the Lord our God, it should not be overlooked, nor should it be forgotten in the eternal world. The very angels in the presence of God would shout for joy: and if they would notice it with such delight, we may be well assured that our God and Saviour, at whose call we turn, will not be regardless of so blessed an event.]

CONCLUSION—

[The time will come when you will deeply regret that you have wasted the present hours in frivolous pursuits. Your past ease, and pleasure, and vanities, of whatever kind they have been, where are they? What fruit of them all have you at this time? Compare them with one single hour that has ever been spent in penitential sorrow: Is there any comparison as to the satisfaction they have left behind them?

Again: For what end is your time now allotted you by God? Is it for no higher purpose than to advance your temporal interests? Is there no work that you have to do for him, and none for your own souls? — — —

Again: Will it not be a bitter subject of regret to you in a dying hour, that the day in which you might have worked is passed away; and that the night is arrived when no man can work?

To all then I say, in the name of the Most High God, "Consider your ways." Consider *the evil of them*, that you may see *your guilt*; consider *the fruit of them*, that you may bewail *your folly*; consider *the commands of God relating to them*, that you may *amend them* henceforth, *and obtain from God the blessings* reserved for you in the eternal world.]

DCXLIII.

AN EXHORTATION TO TURN TO GOD.

Zech. i. 3, 6. *Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord. Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? and they returned,*

returned, and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us.

TO those who look for novelties, and enjoy nothing but deep and curious speculations, the words before us will appear uninteresting: but to those who love practical religion, they will convey sentiments and feelings worthy to be cherished by every Child of man. It is a sickly taste that cannot relish them; and that Minister who cannot find in them a proper subject for his discourse, must either labour in a more fruitful part of the Lord's Vineyard than any we are acquainted with, or have different views of Christian edification from those which we are accustomed to entertain. Men at this day, as well as in former ages, are departed from God; and need to be exhorted to "turn unto him" in newness of heart and life. They also need the same warnings and the same encouragements, as those did to whom the prophet spoke. We therefore, without thinking any apology necessary for the selection of so plain a subject, (from which nothing can be offered which is not already familiar to all your minds,) proceed to call your attention to this solemn address: in which you may notice,

I. A friendly exhortation —

The Jews, after their return from Babylon, had been extremely remiss in rebuilding their Temple; but they were almost instantaneously wrought upon by the preaching of the prophet Haggai to resume the work which had been intermitted: and on this account God sent them another prophet, who by his exhortations and instructions should encourage them to proceed, and keep alive the zeal which had been kindled in their minds. But where is there not remissness in the work of God? Where is there one who does not need the direction and encouragement here offered? O Brethren, hear ye the direction; "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts"—

[We have all revolted, and turned aside from God: we have "all gone after vanity, and become vain:" we "have turned every

every one of us to his own way;" some after their vile lusts and passions; others after the world with all its cares and vanities; others in the more creditable, but not less fatal, way of self-righteous formality. But we should turn to the Lord, to him only, to him entirely, and with the whole heart. We should turn to him in a way of deep contrition for our past offences, of lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy and forgiveness, and of unreserved obedience to his commandments. This is the way in which God expects us to turn unto him [a]: and to this alone does he give any promise of a favourable acceptance [b]."]

Hear ye also the encouragement; "I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts"—

[God is alienated from us, as we are from him; and from us he turns, whilst in our unconverted state, with wrathful indignation. But, if we "turn to him, he will turn to us:" "if we draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to us:" if we will call upon him in truth, he will hear, accept, and bless us. To the impenitent "he is a consuming fire:" but to the penitent, a Saviour and a friend. Search the Inspired Volume, search the annals of the whole world, and find, if you can, one mourning and believing penitent whom he cast out; or find, if you can, any limit to his mercy and grace. In "turning unto us" is implied not only a reversal of all the judgments which he had purposed to inflict upon us, but a communication of all that a Father's love, and a Saviour's grace can bestow,—pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory.

And here it will be proper to notice the frequent repetition of his name, "The Lord of Hosts." Was that repetition without design? No: it is intended to impress on our minds, that, as the message is from him, so is the particular direction stamped with his authority, and the particular promise confirmed by his unchanging truth and faithfulness. It is in the name of the Lord of Hosts that we come; it is the word of the Lord of Hosts that we speak: it is the veracity of the Lord of Hosts that is pledged for its accomplishment.]

To this exhortation is added,

II. A salutary caution—

We are apt to follow the examples of our fathers, and to tread the path which they have trod before us. Not that we so readily conform to the practice of *godly* parents: their example, though not destitute of weight, finds more than a counterpoise in our evil passions, and in the conduct of those around us: but in justification

[a] Jer. iii. 10. [b] Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

cation of our own *evil* ways we are glad enough to plead the habits and authority of those who have gone before us. This however will be of no avail. Such examples form no precedent for us. The word of God is our rule: and according to that we must walk, regardless of all that others have done, or may do, to establish any other rule. Attend then to this salutary caution:

Walk not as your disobedient fathers have done—

[The generality of those who have gone before us have walked just as the great mass around us do at this time. But a state of worldliness, or sensuality, or carnal indifference was not *therefore right*, because they lived in it; nor is it *therefore safe*, because they died in it. In like manner, the conduct of our superiors at this day is no rule for us. If they truly and unreservedly obey the voice of God in his word, cleaving to the Lord Jesus Christ with full purpose of heart, and devoting themselves in body, soul, and spirit to his service, we may follow them: but even then we must not regard them as infallible: we must not follow even St. Paul himself any farther than he followed Christ: and whereinsoever they deviate from the path marked out for them by Almighty God, there we must choose the more perfect way, and adhere exclusively to that which unerring Wisdom has prescribed to us, knowing no other rule than that of God's commands.

Doubtless in dubious matters we would recommend much deliberation, and diffidence, and circumspection. We would not have young people setting up their judgment hastily against that of their superiors in age and station: for the young and inexperienced are apt to see things in a very partial light, and not to take a sufficiently comprehensive view of any subject; and hence they often err, when in their own judgment they are most confident that they are acting right. But still the word of God must be your rule: you must try every thing by that standard: if what you see, or what is recommended to you, be evidently contrary to that, you must not do it, though it be sanctioned by the authority of the whole world: nor, if a line of conduct be clearly and undoubtedly agreeable to that, must you be diverted from it, even though the whole world rose up to oppose you. It is by the word of God that you will be judged in the last day; and therefore by that, and that only, must you be regulated now.]

This salutary caution is further confirmed by,

III. A convincing appeal—

"Your

"Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?" No: both the one and the other are gone to give up their account to God, and to receive from him their proper doom. Now, whatever they may have thought or done, they know that God's word is true, and that it shall stand for ever. But to a certain degree this may be seen even in this world.

Has not the word of God taken hold of multitudes who have gone before us?

[Look at the Antediluvian world: Were not God's threatenings verified in them? Look at the Jews at the time of the Babylonish captivity: Did the word of God fail with respect to them? They put to death their prophets for predicting that captivity; but were the predictions falsified? Were the Jews able to avert, or to escape, the judgments that had been denounced? Look at the Jews at this present time, and compare their state with all the prophecies concerning them, from the time of Moses to that of Christ and his Apostles: Has one word fallen to the ground? Has not the word of God found them out? In like manner, if we could go into the invisible world, we should there see, what now we are so unwilling to believe, that not so much as one jot or tittle of God's word has ever failed. Of the unregenerate, not one has entered into the kingdom of God; and of the impenitent and unbelieving, not one has "escaped the damnation of hell." This is a fearful thought: but, if in no instance that is visible has God's word ever failed, so neither has it, or shall it fail in those which are invisible.]

Have not many who have gone before us borne testimony to this truth?

[The Jews on many occasions acknowledged it[c], and actually returned to God in consequence of the conviction impressed by it on their minds. In fact, every real penitent is a witness for this truth. He confesses, that his sins have found him out, and that, if mercy interpose not for his deliverance, all the judgments denounced against sin will in due season come upon him. Be convinced then, whilst conviction may be of some avail: and wait not to learn, by bitter experience, what now, if credited, you might escape. Let not that come upon you, of which you are forewarned in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man would not believe the evil and danger of a carnal life, till he was made to experience its bitter fruits. His surviving brethren too, who walked in his steps, accounted themselves sure

[c] Lam. ii. 17. & iv. 11, 12. Dan. ix. 11—13.

sure of happiness in the eternal world, when, if a message could have been sent to them from the dead, they would have been better informed[d]. But they had Moses and the Prophets; and so have you; yes, and Christ and his Apostles also, all bearing the same testimony. And therefore as unto dying men I would speak; knowing that I myself also am soon to die, and that both preacher and hearers must, in a very little time, appear at the judgment-seat of Christ;—I, to give an account of my ministry; and you, of the use you have made of it. I beseech you, receive not the grace of God in vain! In the name of the Lord of Hosts I declare unto you, that, if you will turn unto him in humiliation and faith, he will turn unto you in reconciliation and love; and that, if you will "turn from all your transgressions unto the Lord Jesus Christ, your iniquities, great and manifold as they have been, shall not be your ruin."]

[d] Luke xvi. 27, 28.

DCXLIV.

CHRIST'S INTERCESSION FOR JERUSALEM.

Zech. i. 12, 13. *Then the angel of the Lord answered and said, O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words, and comfortable words.*

TO the antient Prophets revelations were often made by visions. It was in a vision by night that this communication respecting God's designs towards Jerusalem was made to the prophet Zechariah. There were presented to his view "a Man riding upon a red horse, standing amongst myrtle-trees in a bottom: and behind him a number of others, on red horses, and speckled, and white[a]." The "myrtle-trees in the bottom" represented the Lord's people in a low and debased state. "The Man on the red horse standing among them" was the Lord Jesus Christ; (as we shall see more fully in the sequel;) and "those on other horses behind him" were angels attendant on him, to execute his will. The prophet, anxious to know who these attendants were, asked the question, and gained from the Man, (who is also

[a] ver. 8.

also called "the Angel,") the desired information; namely, that they were Beings, "whom Jehovah had sent to walk to and fro through the earth," and to bring him intelligence respecting the state of its inhabitants. These attendant angels being then interrogated respecting the result of their inquiries, informed the Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, that "all the earth was sitting still, and at rest[b]." Upon this, "the Man," "the Angel," the Lord Jesus Christ, poured forth before his heavenly Father his intercession in behalf of Jerusalem under her present desolate condition, intreating that mercy might at last be vouchsafed unto her: and by his Father he is "answered with good words, and comfortable words."

The two points then for our consideration are,

I. The Angel's intercession—

"The Angel" is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ—

["The Man," and "the Angel," are evidently the same person, even the Angel of the Covenant, who on many occasions, whilst he assumed the appearance of a "man," demonstrated himself to be of a superior order of Beings, even an angel, yea, and superior also to all the angelic host, even God himself, who had condescended to take on him the human and angelic appearance, in order to manifest himself to his people in a way suited to the weakness of their corporeal and mental faculties. It was in this way that he appeared to Jacob, wrestling with him as a man, and an angel, yet blessing him as God[c]. The prophet Zechariah also speaks of him in another place as "the Man, that was Jehovah's fellow," or equal[d].

As the great Advocate of his people, he intercedes for them on all occasions, yea, "ever liveth on purpose to make intercession for them:" and in the passage before us he prophetically and mystically proclaimed his future office, which in our nature he should execute at the right hand of God.]

His intercession was for the restoration of God's favour to his chosen people—

[Though the Jews had returned from Babylon, yet had they not in any degree recovered from the desolations which had been spread through their whole country. The rebuilding of their Temple, though begun, had been for some time suspended; and no prospect

[b] ver. 9—11.

[c] Compare Gen. xxxii. 24—30. with Hos. xii. 3—5. See also Josh. v. 13—15.

[d] Zech. xiii. 7.

prospect remained of their recovering their former prosperity, unless God by his special providence should interpose for them, and, by a richer effusion of his grace, stir them up to the exertions that were necessary for the occasion. The time was now particularly favourable: the attendant angels, whom he had sent forth to explore the state of the world, had brought word, "The whole earth was still, and at rest;" and consequently there was no just reason to fear those powerful interruptions which they had hitherto experienced: and, if other nations were prospering, how painful was it to see Jerusalem excluded from participating the blessings which were diffused all around her! Already had she endured the indignation of God during the space of threescore and ten years: it might be hoped therefore, that now, at last, the season was arrived when she should once more experience the blessedness of his favour.

Whilst we contemplate this intercession for the Jews at that period, how strongly are we reminded of our duty towards them at this time, when they have borne the indignation of Jehovah, not for seventy, but seventeen hundred, years; and when, so far from being restored to their country, they are still scattered over the face of the whole earth! The state of peace too which Europe now enjoys, leaves us at liberty to seek their welfare in a way which was scarcely practicable in the midst of war. Our attention now may be more deeply fixed on them, and our means be more liberally employed in their service. And shall we neglect to improve the opportunity? Shall we see all the nations recovering from their distresses, and feel no desire to impart blessings to God's antient people, who are still in as disconsolate a state as ever? Does not gratitude to God, and love to immortal souls, demand this at our hands? Methinks the present circumstances of the world afford us an occasion, not unlike to that which the Samaritan woman enjoyed, when conversing with Jesus; who said to her, "If thou hadst known Who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and he would have given thee living water[e]." Yes, if we duly appreciated the benefits we now enjoy, we should labour to improve them, for the spiritual welfare of ourselves, and of all around us.]

What success we might hope for is manifest from the whole tenor of,

II. Jehovah's answer—

"The Lord answered the Angel with good and comfortable words."

What this answer was, we are afterwards more distinctly informed—

[The Angel who had interceded, kept not the answer within his

[e] John iv. 10.

his own bosom, but imparted it to the prophet, and commanded him to communicate it to the people, for whom the intercession had been made. In substance it was this; That God had determined to restore Jerusalem; and that, notwithstanding her condition was in appearance hopeless, it should become more prosperous than at any period of her former history. As for those who had oppressed her, or were now at ease and regardless of her welfare, he was "sore displeased with them," and would require it at their hands: but Jerusalem herself should yet become the joy of the whole earth, enriched and comforted with all imaginable blessings[f].

The promises contained in this answer, doubtless have a primary reference to Judea at that time: but they also look forward to a period yet future, when the Jews shall return from their present dispersion, and be re-established in their own land. A beautiful description of that period is given in a subsequent chapter of this prophecy[g] —— as also in numberless other passages of Holy Writ[h] ——]

Say now whether these be not "good words, and comfortable words?"

[The re-establishment of the Jews in their own land at that time, and the restoration of Divine worship in the midst of them, was an unspeakable blessing, for which no adequate thanks or praise could be rendered. But what will their future restoration be? How replete with happiness to them, and with honour to their God! Taken in connexion too with their spiritual welfare, and the welfare of the whole Gentile world, which will be promoted by it, how utterly will it surpass all human expectation, and all finite conception! Verily, "the light of the moon will in that day be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days." Let the promises then that relate to it be "good" in our estimation, and a source of "comfort" to all our souls.]

From hence we may SEE,

1. What encouragement we have to pray for our own souls—

[Alas! in what a low state is even the Christian world! Scarcely, if at all, are the generality of Christians in a better condition than the Jews themselves: the same neglect of God, the same worldly and carnal habits, the same indifference to the concerns of the soul, are found amongst the one as the other. For the most part, we are in the very same predicament as they were previous to the establishment of the Gospel among the Gentiles. They rested in the law, and made their boast of God, and, in

[f] ver. 14—17. [g] Zech. viii. 2—8.
[h] See Jer. xxx. 3, 9, 10, 17—22. & xxxi. 3—14.

in consequence of their possessing a revelation of his will, assumed the high-sounding titles of 'guides of the blind, instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes;' and yet, though professing to be teachers of others, they taught not themselves, and, whilst making their boast of the law, through breaking the law they dishonoured God[i]. Thus do we act in relation to the Gospel. We glory over the Jews who are ignorant of the Messiah whom we worship, and yet, in point of pure morality and solid piety, we are not a jot superior to them. Nevertheless, if we implored mercy at the hands of God in the name and for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we should assuredly obtain an answer of peace. O what good and comfortable words does the Gospel contain! What exceeding great and precious promises are there made to every true penitent! Will Christ ever cast out one of this description? Never. Is there to be found so much as one single word in all the Bible that should prove a source of discouragement to such a character? No, not one; on the contrary, if there were but one such Being in the universe, God would fix his eyes upon him with pleasure, and press him to his bosom with more than parental kindness. Call then upon Him, whoever thou art that mournest thy low condition; and know, that, as sure as ever thou humblest thyself before God, thou shalt be exalted in due time.]

2. What encouragement we have to intercede for the Church of God—

[Whether we contemplate the state of the Jews or Gentiles, we find equal need to importune God in their behalf. Even the Christian world are far from being in that state of purity and blessedness which their superior privileges authorize them to expect. We should therefore lay to heart the state of the world around us: "our eyes should be as a fountain of tears, to run down day and night" in behalf of the myriads who are perishing in their sins. We should implore of God to take to him his great power, and reign amongst us, and to hasten the season when "all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Our blessed Lord teaches us to make it a part of our daily prayer, and never to approach our God without saying, "Thy kingdom come." Did we but thus plead with God from day to day, what might we not hope for? Verily, our prayer should not go forth in vain: nor should it be with "good and comfortable words" only that God would answer us, but with an abundant effusion of his Spirit, as in the days of old. Then should "a little one become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; for the Lord would hasten it in his time[k]."]

[i] Rom. ii. 17—24. [k] Isai. lx. 22.

DCXLV.

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWISH CHURCH PREDICTED.

Zech. iii. 15. *And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the Angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair mitre on his head. So they set a fair mitre on his head, and clothed him with garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by.*

THE prophecies of Zechariah are by no means easy to be understood: but by attending to the general scope of his subject, we shall generally get an insight into their true meaning. It is not any one particular expression that will give us the best clue to the meaning of the prophet: on the contrary, we may, by laying an undue stress on some word or form of expression, involve the whole in insurmountable difficulty. For instance; if, because it is said, "The Lord hath chosen Jerusalem," we suppose Joshua to represent Jerusalem, and the whole people of the Jews; or, because "Satan is said to stand at Joshua's right hand," (the place of the accuser in a court of justice,) we interpret the whole as a judicial process, we shall never acquire a just and consistent view of the prophecy: we must bear in mind the prophet's main object, and then every part of his prophecy will appear easy, natural, and clear.

It shall be my endeavour to set before you,

I. Its primary and prophetical import—

The prophet was sent on purpose to encourage the Jews to rebuild their Temple, and restore the whole worship of the Temple as it had been prescribed by Moses. The former of these objects he had already attempted, by assurances that Jerusalem should be restored

restored to a great measure of its former splendor and prosperity: and the latter he now endeavours to promote, by declaring to them a vision with which he had been favoured, wherein it had been shewn him, that, however improbable such an event might be, it was ordained of God, and should surely and speedily be accomplished.

[Joshua the high priest is here represented as ministering before the Lord Jesus Christ, in the regular exercise of his priestly office[a].

What the precise state of Joshua's mind was at the time, we are not *certainly* informed: but, from the whole of the vision, it appears, that he was bemoaning his own sins, and the sins both of the priests and people, and intreating God to interpose for the restoration of his own worship among them.

To obstruct his efforts, Satan put forth all his power. Satan is peculiarly active when the honour of God and the interests of immortal souls are to be opposed. He knew how greatly the restoration of Divine worship would advance both the one and the other of these objects, and therefore he set himself instantly to counteract the designs of Joshua. It is probable that the means he used for this end were, first, by representing to God the greatness of the people's sins, to alienate the mind of God from them; (in this way it was that he resisted Job[b]:) and then by similar representations to discourage the heart of Joshua, and to fill him with despondency.

In support of Joshua, "the Angel of the Lord," that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, rebuked Satan, saying, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." In this form of speaking, a distinction of Persons in the Godhead is clearly marked, as it is also in many other places[c]. The Angel of the Lord is here exercising the unalienable prerogative of Jehovah in forgiving sins; yet refers it to the Father to rebuke Satan, because he is acting the part of an Advocate with the Father in behalf of Joshua and the Jewish Church: and in the rebuke itself, he assures Satan, that all his attempts against Joshua shall fail. "The Lord had chosen Jerusalem;" and would not suffer his own eternal purposes to be defeated. Besides, Joshua, and the Jewish Church whom he represented, were "as a brand plucked out of the fire." *This* Satan could not but know and acknowledge: Could he think therefore that they had been plucked out of the fire in order to be cast back again into it? Was this ever the way in which Jehovah acted? Were not rather the manifestations of his mercy and love pledges and earnests of yet further blessings? Thus was Satan confounded before him, and Joshua comforted with the hope of ultimate success.

Satan being thus baffled, the Angel proceeds to impart more fully

[a] The priests *stood* to minister. See Deut. x. 8.
[b] Job i. 6—12. & ii. 1—6. [c] Gen. xix. 24. Ps. cx. 1.

fully to Joshua the assurances he so much desired. The Temple not being rebuilt, Joshua had none but old and "filthy garments" wherein to minister before the Lord: the Lord Jesus therefore commands that these be taken from him, and exchanged for others more worthy of the office which Joshua was called to execute. And, as a mitre was no less requisite for the high priest than pure and holy garments, he orders "a fair mitre to be put upon his head." This signified two things; first, the removal of all guilt from Joshua and those whom he represented, so that they might stand with acceptance before God; and next, the restoration of the Temple service in all its excellency and glory. *These were the points which Joshua had been pleading for before the angel; and these were the points assured to him in this vision.*

The attendant angels were employed in executing Jehovah's purpose in relation to these things: and "the Angel of the Lord," the Lord Jesus Christ, "stood by," to see that completed, which, by his effectual meditation, he had obtained.]

This appears to me to be the primary and prophetical import of the vision before us. We proceed to notice,

II. Its secondary and mystical import—

As individuals, no less than the Church at large, are the Temple of Jehovah; so every true Believer, no less than Joshua, is a priest unto his God[d]. Hence we may fitly consider Joshua as the representative of individual saints; all of whom minister before the Lord from day to day, under diversified discouragements, but with certainty of ultimate success. See here,

1. Their discouragements—

[The state of the Jews at that time may not unfitly be regarded as characterizing the state of a Believer in the earlier stages of his progress. He has been delivered indeed from bondage; but he is still in a very low and destitute condition, and is ready to doubt whether the work that has been begun within him can ever be perfected. He goes before his God from day to day; but comes away more discouraged than before. Satan, that malignant adversary, is more especially active at such seasons, and stands at his right hand to resist him. Numberless are the stratagems which this subtle enemy uses to obstruct his progress and to damp his hopes. He represents to the Believer's mind the enormity of his sins; and intimates, that they are too great to be forgiven. He adduces them as proofs that God has not elected him; and that therefore to seek for mercy is a hopeless task. It is on this account that Satan is called "The accuser of the

[d] 1 Peter ii. 9. Rev. i. 6.

the brethren," because he accuses them to God, and God to them; yea, and accuses them also to themselves, in order to bring them to despair.

We forbear to notice the outward opposition which Satan raises against them, by persecutions and temptations of different kinds, because it is of that opposition which he makes to them at the throne of grace that we are more particularly led to speak. But "he desires to have them," as he did to have Peter of old, "that he may sift them as wheat:" and if he were left without controul from a higher power, he would soon reduce them all to chaff.]

2. Their certainty of final success—

[Believers "have an Advocate with the Father," the Lord Jesus Christ, "who is also the propitiation for our sins[e]:" and through the care of this ever watchful Protector they are secured, so that "no weapon that is formed against them can prosper." In the rebuke which this Almighty friend gives to Satan, there are two things which afford them peculiar consolation; namely, the evidence which they have, that, notwithstanding all their remaining infirmities, a work of grace has been begun upon them; and, the immutability of Him who has thus distinguished them by his grace. True, they see in themselves the fearful marks of the fire in which they have been burned, and a lamentable susceptibility of impression from fire, if by any means they come in contact with it. But from these very things a question arises in their minds, How is it that I am not wholly consumed? If "the bush burn with fire and is not consumed," is there not reason to hope that God is in the bush? Then I will hope, and not be afraid: for though with man it would be impossible to make use of me as a part of God's temple, it is not so with God; for with him all things are possible; and "his gifts and calling are without repentance[f]."

Further; whilst deploring their extreme unworthiness to serve and enjoy God, they hear the order given, "Take from him his filthy garments, and give him a change of raiment:" and, clothed in the unspotted robe of their Redeemer's righteousness[g], they know that "their iniquity is taken away, and their sin covered[h]." They see that there is a sufficiency in the provision thus made for them[g], and they rejoice in it: and, thus habited, they hope to minister before God with increasing pleasure upon earth, and to stand before him with acceptance in his Temple above.

Here is their hope; "The Angel of the Lord stands by." That Angel has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world; and, with such an Advocate and Intercessor, they defy all the power of their enemy: assured that "neither the power nor policy of hell shall ever prevail against them."]

Would

[e] 1 John ii. 1. [f] Rom. xi. 29. [g] Rev. iii. 18. [h] Isai. lxi. 10.

Would we make a suitable IMPROVEMENT of this passage?

1. Let us not despair of the Church's prosperity, however low or desolate her present condition may be—

[The prophet's word was accomplished: and low as the state of the Jewish Church is, all that is spoken respecting her shall yet be accomplished. She is destined to be the joy and glory of the whole earth. The degradation and dispersion of her members shall not always continue. Glorious days are yet in reserve for her[i]; and "when she shall turn to the Lord, her Messiah, ungodliness shall be turned away from her, and all Israel shall be saved[k]."

The Gentiles also, though now so dark,—millions upon millions of them being as ignorant of God and his Christ as the very beasts that perish,—shall one day be joined to the Lord, and, as a royal priesthood, shall offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise continually, throughout the whole earth. Who that sees the state of the Heathen world would suppose that this ever could be? But God has said, that all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God:" and "He is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent."]

2. Let us commit our own souls altogether to the care of our all-prevailing Advocate and Mediator—

[Jesus lives: and because he lives, we shall live also; for "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." If we be his people, we must expect that Satan will use his utmost efforts to destroy us: but he is a vanquished enemy; and "if we resist him manfully, he will flee from us." When he seems as if he would overpower us, let us call in Omnipotence to our aid, and say, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." Let us never doubt the power of our Almighty Friend to succour us, or his faithfulness to preserve us. If we look to ourselves, or if we look to our great adversary, there is nothing but discouragement: but if we look unto Jesus, there is no ground for fear: he can overcome the strong man armed, and liberate us from his yoke. He who "spoiled principalities and powers upon the cross," and "led captivity captive" in his ascension, can he not bruise Satan under our feet now? He can; he will: and the weakest Believer who trusts in him shall "be more than conqueror" over earth and hell. "Faithful is He who hath promised; who also will do it."]

[i] Zech. i. 17. & ii. 10—12. & viii. 1—8. [k] Rom. xi. 26, 27.

DCXLVI.

THE VISION OF THE OLIVE-TREES.

Zech. iv. 11—14. *Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive-trees upon the right side of the candlestick, and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him; What be these two olive-branches, which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me, and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two Anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*

VISIONS, under the Old-Testament dispensation, were like Parables under the New: they gave a shadowy representation of some important truths. They are frequently very obscure: yet there is almost invariably a clue given us, whereby to discover their real import; and not unfrequently an explanation of them is given by God himself. As in the parables, there will be sometimes found circumstances, the precise drift of which is not easy to be explained: but an attention to the main scope of the whole will keep us from ever deviating far from the true interpretation.

The vision which we are about to consider is certainly not very obvious at first sight; and it requires to be investigated with great sobriety of mind: but, when properly understood, it will richly repay the care we have used in the investigation of it. The prophet's solicitude to understand it, shews us the propriety of inquiring into it with care and diligence. Let us therefore endeavour to ascertain,

I. The import of the vision—

The general scope of it is declared by God himself—

[The prophet Zechariah was commissioned to encourage Zerubbabel and Joshua to proceed with the re-building of the Temple, which had been long neglected. The Jews that had returned from Babylon were poor and feeble; whilst their adversaries were numerous and powerful. Hence they despaired of accomplishing, under such unfavourable circumstances, so great a work. But in this vision they were taught to look to God, who, if they confided in him, would assuredly crown their labours with success. With him on their side, they needed not either to regret the want of power in themselves, or to dread the existence of it in their adversaries,

saries, since he was almighty and all-sufficient for them. This was the construction which the prophet himself was taught to put upon the vision: "Knowest thou not what these be? said the angel unto him: No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts[b]."]

The particular parts of it will be found to bear upon this point with much beauty and exactness—

[In the 2d and 3d verses we have the vision: "What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold, a candlestick, all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon the top thereof; and two olive-trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on the left side thereof." In our text there is an additional circumstance mentioned, namely, that "the olive-branches empty out of themselves golden oil through the two golden pipes." What the import of all this was, the prophet was very anxious to know; and therefore *repeated* his inquiries with a kind of holy impatience[b]: and the answer given him was, "The two olive-trees are the two Anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." From this answer we may gather both the *literal* and *mystical* interpretation of the whole.

The literal import then was this. Zerubbabel and Joshua were the two persons anointed of God to superintend, the one the civil, and the other the ecclesiastical, affairs of the Jews at that time. They had but little power in themselves, yet were they ordained of God to effect great things: and God engaged through them to impart unto the people such supplies of wisdom and strength, as should enable the whole nation to shine with their former splendor. However weak therefore they were in themselves, they must not despair; for every mountain should, before Zerubbabel, become a plain.

The mystical import must be more minutely explained. It must never be forgotten that that whole dispensation was typical. The return of the Jews from Babylon, and the restoration of their civil and ecclesiastical polity, were typical of the deliverance of sinners from their spiritual bondage, and the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. Bearing this in mind, we shall see how this vision illustrates the purposes of God, in relation to the Church of Christ. *The lamps* are emblems of his Church, which shines as a light in a dark world. *The pipes* are the ordinances of religion, by means of which continual supplies of oil are imparted to them, that their light may never be extinguished. *The bowl* is the Gospel, which abounds with blessings for all, according to their several necessities. *The oil* is the Holy

[a] ver. 4—6. [b] Mark the repetition, ver. 11, & 12.

Holy Spirit, by whom alone the light that has been set up can be kept alive. And *the two olive-trees*, from whence that oil spontaneously flows into the bowl, are the kingly and priestly offices of Christ, who, like Zerubbabel and Joshua, is appointed of God to establish Jerusalem, and to build the spiritual temple of the Lord. He is exalted to the right hand of God, and "stands by the Lord of the whole earth," that he may carry on every thing in conformity with the Divine will, and accomplish, in due season, the work that has been committed to him. He himself, as the Messiah, the Christ, is the Anointed of the Lord; (the words Messiah and Christ both mean Anointed;) and from him flows "the unction of the Holy One," by which all spiritual light and life are communicated to the Church[c].]

The proof of these several points will be more advantageously adduced under the next head of our discourse, in which we propose to point out the proper improvement of the vision, or,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

To ascertain this, we must bear in mind *the scope* of the vision: for, if we forget that, the whole interpretation of it may be thought fanciful: but, if we duly regard that, the whole instruction derived from the vision will appear sober, just, and pertinent. It teaches us, then,

1. That Christ is, by his offices, qualified to support and perfect his Church—

[The offices filled by Zerubbabel and Joshua both unite in Christ. He is the High Priest of his Church; and in that capacity he is now officiating at the right hand of God. He offered himself a sacrifice for us at the appointed time; and he is now entered with his own blood into the Holy of Holies, to plead the merit of that blood, and to make intercession for us before the mercy-seat of Jehovah. Hence he is called "The Apostle and High Priest of our profession[d];" and it is from the consideration that we have such an High Priest, that we are encouraged to hold fast our profession[e]. Moreover he is a King; God has "set him as his King upon the holy hill of Zion[f]." And to this the Apostle Peter bore witness on the day of Pentecost, saying, "God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ[g]." From the union of these two offices in him arises his ability to build his Church. Were either of them wanting, he would fail; but, by the concentration of infinite merit and almighty

[c] 1 John ii. 20—27.
[d] Heb. iii. 1.
[e] Heb. iv. 14—16. & ix. 11, 12. & x. 21, 22.
[f] Ps. ii. 6.
[g] Acts ii. 36.

almighty power in his sacred person, he is fully qualified for the work assigned him. This is particularly marked by Zechariah in a following chapter, where he says, "Behold the Man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and *he shall build the Temple* of the Lord: even *He shall build the Temple* of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be A PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both[h]." Thus standing by the Lord of the whole earth, and sustaining in himself the united offices of Zerubbabel and Joshua, he is really to the Church what they were in a shadow, the source of all that is necessary for her spiritual edification."]

2. That the fulness which is in him is expressly committed to him, for the use and benefit of his Church—

["It has pleased the Lord that in Him should all fulness dwell[i]." But for whose sake is it committed to him? his own? No; but ours. He appears in heaven, not in a private, but public capacity; even as the Head of his Church. At his ascension thither he *received* gifts; and received them *in order to impart* them to rebellious man[k]. He ascended, on purpose "that he might fill all things[l]." He is the Head; and "the Church is his body, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all[m]." Hence we find, that, when the Holy Ghost was poured forth on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter confidently traced the gift to HIM, even to that very Jesus who had so recently been crucified as a malefactor: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses: therefore being by the right-hand of God exalted, and *having received* of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, *he hath shed forth* this which ye now see and hear[n]." And to the same effect St. Paul also says, that God "saves us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of *the Holy Ghost*, which he *shed on us* abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour[o]." These passages reflect great light upon our text, inasmuch as they shew that Christ is the true source of all spiritual blessings to the Church; and that the Holy Spirit, with all his graces and consolations, flows from him according to the Father's will, just as the oil in the vision dropped from the olive-trees into the bowl, for the continual supply of the lamps dependent on it.]

3. That

[h] Zech. vi. 12, 13. It is remarkable, that in this passage, where our Lord is called a King and a Priest, he is particularly designated as *The Branch*. [i] Col. i. 19.

[k] Compare Ps. lxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8. "received," "gave."

[l] Eph. iv. 10. [m] Eph. i. 20—23. [n] Acts ii. 32, 33.

[o] Tit. iii. 5, 6.

3. That in the use of his ordinances, we may expect all needful supplies—

[It was through the pipes only that the lamps received the oil; and it is through the ordinances only that we can receive "supplies of the Spirit" from Jesus Christ[p]. He will be inquired of for all that he has promised us[q]. "If we ask not, we cannot have[r]." We must wait upon him in private, reading his word, meditating upon it, and praying over it. We must wait upon him also in public, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," but expecting more particular manifestations of his love, and richer communications of his grace, through the medium of his preached Gospel. "Where two or three are met together in his name," there it is that he sheds forth his Spirit in a more abundant measure[s]. Verily, if we watch unto prayer, and abound therein with thanksgiving, we shall never be disappointed of our hope. We shall have just reason to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." "The hungry he will fill with good things: it is the rich only," and the self-sufficient, "that he ever sends empty away." "The diligent soul shall be made fat."

And here let me observe, that, in the vision, *the lamps, the pipes, the bowl, the oil, were all of gold.* Those who wait upon the Lord in sincerity and truth are in themselves as superior to unregenerate men as gold is to the baser metals. And what is there of such value as the grace of which they have been made partakers? in comparison of it, all else is but as dung and dross. And are there not in the Gospel "unsearchable riches?" And may we not well say, that under the ordinances, whether public or private, we have enjoyed many *golden* opportunities? Yes indeed: and if we be careful to keep up the communication between Christ and our souls, we shall have all our wants abundantly supplied[t], and the "salvation ministered unto us shall be as a lamp that burneth[u]."]

4. That however low our state may be, or powerful our enemies, His grace shall be sufficient for us—

[Of this were Zerubbabel and Joshua assured: and the event corresponded with the vision. Of this too may *we* be assured; for to *us*, no less than to St. Paul, does the Lord Jesus say, "My grace is sufficient for you." Is that grace at present imparted in but a low degree? Still God says to us, "Who hath despised the day of small things[x]?" 'I do not: and therefore let not any of you do it.' 'Are our enemies exceeding powerful? God teaches us again to say, "Who art thou, O great mountain?

[p] Phil. i. 19. [q] Ezek. xxxvi. 37. [r] Jam. iv. 2.
[s] Matt. xviii. 20 [t] Phi. iv. 19. [u] Isai. lxii. 1.
[x] ver. 10.

tain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain[y]." Have we an evidence in ourselves that the Lord Jesus Christ has begun a work of grace within us? God again teaches us to say, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house: his hands also shall finish it[z]." Shall it be thought that these passages relate only to that particular occasion? Look then to the New Testament, and there you will find all the same assurances and triumphs. We are told that "He, who has been the author, will also be the finisher of our faith[a]." We may be confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Christ[b]." And even now, whilst yet conflicting with our enemies, we may say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that shall condemn? Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: I am persuaded, that neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[c]." "The plummet is in the hands of our Zerubbabel, with those seven" attendant spirits, "who are the eyes of the Lord, and run to and fro through the whole earth;" and he will see that the work is perfected in us according to his will[d].

Look ye then, Beloved, to our adorable Lord and Saviour, and let nothing interrupt your communication with him. It is your privilege to be daily and hourly "receiving, out of his fulness, grace," according to the grace that is in him, and sufficient for all your necessities[e]. Do you feel your need of repentance, or pardon, or any blessing whatsoever? Know that "he is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins[f]:" and though you are not to expect the Holy Ghost to be imparted to you in his miraculous powers, you may in his gracious influences: yes, "ye shall receive the Holy Ghost; for the promise is to you, and to your children, and to as many as are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call[g]." And though you may still have many conflicts, the time is not far distant, when, the work being completed in you, the head-stone thereof shall be brought forth with shouting;" and to all eternity you shall cry, "Grace, grace unto it[h]."]

[y] ver. 7. [z] ver. 9. [a] Heb. xii. 2.
[b] Phil. i. 6. [c] Rom. viii. 31—39.
[d] ver. 10. with Ch. i. 8—11. [e] John i. 16.
[f] Acts v. 31. [g] Acts ii. 38, 39. [h] ver. 7.

DCXLVII.

OUTWARD SERVICES VAIN WITHOUT OBEDIENCE.

Zech. vii. 4—7. *Then came the word of the Lord of Hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity?*

THIS was an answer to a question which had been proposed to the prophet, by persons who had been sent from Babylon to consult him on a matter of considerable importance. The Jews, when carried captive to Babylon, instituted four annual fasts[a], two of which are mentioned in the text; that in the fifth month, in remembrance of the destruction of their Temple and city by Nebuzar-adan, the Chaldean General; and the other, in remembrance of the murder of Gedaliah, who had been placed, as Governor, over the poorer part of the Jewish population that were left in the land[b]. But the people were now restored to their land; and the Temple was in part rebuilt; and therefore it was justly doubted, by those who yet remained in Babylon, whether it was proper to continue those fasts, now that the judgments on account of which the fasts were instituted were removed. This was a question which could not be satisfactorily answered, but by one who was inspired of God to declare his will respecting it. But before a direct answer was given to it, the prophet was instructed to reprove the whole nation, priests as well as people, for the manner in which those fasts had been observed. They are not blamed for instituting the fasts, but for the hypocrisy which they had manifested in the observance of them.

The reproof here given to the Jewish nation furnishes us with a fit occasion,

I. To

[a] Zech. viii. 19. [b] 2 Kin. xxv. 8—10, 22—25.

I. To inquire into the principles by which we have been actuated in our religious duties—

External acts are of no value in the sight of God, any farther than as they express the real dispositions of the mind. It is to the principle from which we act, and not to the mere act itself, that God looks: and it is to that that we also must look, in order to form a right estimate of our character. Consider then,

1. To whom we ought to have performed all our religious services—

[That "fasting and mourning" were religious services, is obvious: and that "eating and drinking" are here used in the same sense, is also obvious. The Jews were ordered by the Mosaic law to carry up their tithes, and their first-fruits, and their free-will offerings, to Jerusalem, and to eat them in the Temple before the Lord[c]: and not being able to carry them thither, they observed the same rites in Babylon. Hence we may properly notice our own religious services in general, whether those of greater solemnity, as public fasts, or those which are of more ordinary occurrence, both public and private. In all of them we ought to have had respect to God; to *his will*, as *the cause*; *his word*, as *the rule*; *his glory*, as *the end*[d]. If not done *for* him, they are not acceptable *to* him: and the more entirely we have respect to him in them, the more pleasing they are in his sight. But if we examine our religious services in this view, how few will be found to have been such as God could accept! Enter distinctly into those three points———, and then say what answer you can return to that searching interrogation, "Did ye perform them to *me*, even unto *me*?"]

2. To whom we have performed them—

[*Self* was the spring of all their services in Babylon; and self has been, for the most part, the true source of ours. With some they have been no more than a decent *regard for the customs* of the place wherein they live. With others, they have originated in *pride*, having been performed only to set a good example to others, or to gratify a self-complacent spirit in themselves. With others again, the observance of them has been prompted by *self-righteousness*, and a vain desire of establishing a righteousness of their own before God. With some too, it is to be feared, their services have been debased by, if not founded in, *hypocrisy*, having been little else than an endeavour to preserve a fair appearance before men, and to get advantage for the promoting of their temporal interests.

In any of these points of view, what is the principle that actuates

[c] Deut. xii. 17, 18. [d] 1 Cor. x. 31.

actuates us? Is it love for God, or zeal for his glory? No: it is *self*, and nothing but self; and inasmuch as we have performed religious services under any of these impressions, it must be said that we have done it "for ourselves," and not for God. Of Pharisaic hypocrisy we would fondly hope, that it is not a common principle amongst us: but formality, and pride, and self-righteousness operate to a vast extent. O let us search and try ourselves in relation to these things——— and we shall find abundant ground for humiliation, where perhaps we imagined there was cause for nothing but self-approbation and joy.]

That we may not perform our services in vain, I will proceed,

II. To shew what practice is necessary to the acceptance of them before God.

The prophet appealed to the Jews, whether their attention ought not rather to be called to the commands of God, which in their more prosperous state they had neglected, and which even now they overlooked?

This is the duty to which we are called—

[Under all circumstances, our first duty is to obey the commands of God: and to bring us to obedience is the end of all his dispensations towards us. If he give prosperity, it is to encourage us to what is good; and, if he send adversity, it is to reclaim us from evil. Even in the gift of his only-begotten Son he aimed particularly at this, the reducing of men to a state of holy obedience, and of an unreserved devotedness to their God[e]———]

Without this, all services, of whatever kind they be, are of no avail—

[In numberless places is this declared by the voice of inspiration: the universal testimony of God's prophets is, "that God has not such pleasure in sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord; but that to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams." The prophet Isaiah in particular insists upon this truth, and in the strongest terms[f]——— Indeed such is God's abhorrence even of the most exalted services, if offered as a substitute for obedience, that he accounts them no better than idolatry and murder[g]. Our blessed Lord in like manner expresses his indignation against those who profess regard for him without manifesting it by a life of holy obedience: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" And, as the prophet appealed to the Jews respecting this, so we would make our appeal to you, assured that, if conscience be allowed to speak, there can be but one sentiment on this subject. It is an incontrovertible

[e] Rom. xiv. 7—10. Tit. ii. 14.
[f] Isai. i. 11—16. & lviii. 1—7.
[g] Isai. lxvi. 3.

tible and fearful truth, that "He is an empty vine, who bringeth forth fruit to himself[h]."]

Let this subject be IMPROVED,

1. For our humiliation—

[Who amongst us does not, on a review of his past conduct, find abundant cause for self-condemnation in his religious duties? Who has not too much consulted *self*, and too little had regard to God? Truly, we all need one to "bear the iniquity of our holiest things," as well as of the things which have been more palpably contrary to the will of God. Let us look to that adorable Saviour on whom all our iniquities were laid, and seek through him alone that gracious acceptance, which services like ours can never merit.]

2. For our direction in future life—

[It is good to serve the Lord: and we must not be discouraged because we cannot serve him so perfectly as we could wish. *Self*, that subtle enemy, will more or less intrude into all we do. But let us be on our guard against this evil principle, and beg of God to deliver us from it. Let us endeavour to get a deeper sense of our obligations to God our Saviour, for all the wonders of redeeming love. This will do more than any thing else to counteract our natural depravity, and to make us "live in all things, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again[i]."]

[h] Hos. x. 1. [i] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

DCXLVIII.

THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS.

Zech. viii. 3—8. *Thus saith the Lord: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, The holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of the people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of Hosts. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.*

THE restoration of the Jews from their present dispersion

dispersion forms a very principal subject of all the prophetic writings; and one cannot but be amazed that it should occupy so small a share of attention amongst the Ministers of religion, as scarcely to be noticed by them. Indeed those who do notice the passages relating to that event, pervert them for the most part, by applying them to the Church of Christ, and giving them an interpretation which they were never designed to bear. From whatever cause this proceeds, it tends exceedingly to keep out of view the mercy of God towards his once-favoured people, and to foster in our bosoms an indifference to their welfare. But let us indulge a more benevolent disposition towards them, and contemplate with pleasure,

I. Their interest in this prophecy—

In its primary sense, it was applicable to the Jews of that day—

[They were at present but a small "remnant," and under circumstances that were very discouraging. They had long been afflicted, both by God and man. Previous to their captivity, the judgments of God had been so heavily inflicted on them, that scarcely an old man was to be found among them; and nothing but want and misery was to be seen in the streets[a]: but now peace and plenty should be restored to them[b]. In a moral view, also, there should be a great and general improvement, insomuch that their city, which had been the seat of the most abominable idolatries, should be called A city of truth; and the mountain where their Temple was rebuilding, The holy mountain.]

But it had respect to the Jewish nation in days that are yet future—

[Of this there is abundant evidence: for Judah alone returned from captivity; whereas the chapter before us speaks of "Israel and Judah." Moreover, the Jews after their return never displayed any great piety; whereas they were, in this prophecy, designated as a holy people. They were also to "be a blessing among the Heathen, as before they had been a curse[c]." But never, at any period, were they so execrated amongst the Heathen, as since their dispersion by the Romans: nor, with the exception of the Saviour and his Apostles, have they ever been such a blessing to the world, as they will be at a future period, when they shall rise up as missionaries in all the countries where they have been scattered, and be the means of converting the whole Gentile world to the faith of Christ[d]. Nor can the concluding part of this chapter be referred to

[a] ver. 10. [b] ver. 11, 12. [c] ver. 13. [d] Mic. v. 7.

to any events that have hitherto taken place in the world. The time is yet to come, when "many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem;" and when "ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you[e]."

What then are the things here predicted? First, the return of the Jews to their own land. And this is an event which shall certainly be accomplished in due season[f]———Next it declares their conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and their instrumentality in converting the Heathen world. This also shall be accomplished at the appointed time[g]———]

God, foreseeing the incredulity of all to whom this prophecy should come, declares,

II. The certainty of its accomplishment, notwithstanding all the difficulties which lie in the way—

When things are far beyond the powers of man we are apt to judge that they never can be effected—

[Unbelief is deeply rooted in the heart of man. When Sarah was informed, that she, notwithstanding the advanced age of herself and her husband, should bear a child, she laughed at the idea, as altogether incredible[h]. The Israelites in the wilderness, notwithstanding they had seen all God's wonders in Egypt and at the Red Sea, conceived it impossible that God should ever give them flesh to eat in the wilderness[i]: and Moses himself staggered at this promise through unbelief[k]. So it is with us all: "we limit the Holy One of Israel[l]," and "judge of him as if he were altogether such an one as ourselves[m]."]

But this is erroneous and absurd—

[Very pointed is that interrogation in the text: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvellous in mine eyes? saith the Lord of Hosts." "There is nothing impossible to God." He that by a word called the whole universe into existence, What can he not do? There were many in our Lord's days who doubted the resurrection of the body, because they could not conceive how the scattered atoms could ever be brought together and re-united into the same corporeal mass, so that every human being from the beginning to the end of the world should have his own proper body. But our blessed Lord said to them, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures and the power

[e] ver. 20—23. [f] Isai. xxvii. 13. Jer. xxx. 3, 18, 19.
[g] Hos. iii. 5. Isai. lxvi. 19, 20. Rom. xi. 12, 15.
[h] Gen. xviii. 9—15. [i] Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. [k] Numb. xi. 18—23.
[l] Ps. lxxviii. 41. [m] Ps. l. 21.

power of God[n]." A just consideration of God's omnipotence would at once have removed all their doubts on this subject, as it will also on every other subject connected with prophecy. Particularly in reference to the final restoration and conversion of the Jews is the power of God insisted on, as a pledge and security for the performance of his promised mercy: "They shall be graffed into their own olive-tree again; *for God is able* to graff them in again[o]." When therefore we see the desperate state to which the Jews are reduced, and feel inclined to ask, "Can these dry bones live?" let us bear in mind, that God has declared they shall live[p], and that "what he has promised he is able also to perform[q]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none indulge unbelief in reference to their own souls—

[Frequently are persons ready to despond, as though their difficulties in the Divine life were too great to be surmounted. And truly, if our salvation depended on our own efforts only, we might well despond. But has not God engaged to keep his people[r]? ——— Has not the Lord Jesus Christ assured us, that "his grace shall be sufficient for us[s]?" Why then should we be cast down, as though there were no hope? See how tenderly God chides us for such unworthy and unbecoming fears[t] ——— and learn to "live by faith in the Lord Jesus," and to be "strong in faith, giving glory to God[u]."

2. Let none indulge it, in reference to the Church of God—

[We confess, "It is marvellous in our eyes," that the Jews should ever become such a people as we are taught to expect. But we are not therefore to doubt whether the promises of God respecting them will be fulfilled. What the prophet predicted respecting the speedy re-establishment of the Jews after their captivity, was fulfilled: and so will his predictions relative to their future restoration. Hence, in the words immediately following the text, it is said, "Let your hands be strong, ye that hear, in these days, these words by the mouth of the prophets:" and again, in ver. 13. "Fear not, but let your hands be strong." So then say I to you at this time: You who are engaged in promoting the welfare of the Jewish nation, "fear not, but let your hands be strong." Your prospects, humanly speaking, are discouraging: but God is on your side: and he who by the sound of rams' horns cast down the walls of Jericho, will, by your feeble efforts, "glorify himself, and make his own strength perfect in your weakness."]

[n] Matt. 22. 29. [o] Rom. xi. 23. [p] Ezek. xxxvii. 3—5.
[q] Rom. iv. 21. [r] 1 Sam. ii. 9. Job xvii. 9. Phil. i. 6.
[s] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [t] Isai. xl. 27—31. [u] Rom. iv. 20.

DCXLIX.

THE CONTEMPT POURED ON CHRIST.

Zech. xi. 12, 13. *And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the House of the Lord.*

THE prophet, under the character of a shepherd, is declaring what reception he had met with from the flock committed to his charge, and what judgments awaited them for their treatment of him. Extremely beautiful and grand is the Address at the beginning of the chapter, where he calls on all orders of the Jewish community to prepare for the sentence that was gone forth against them[a], ——— and threatens to abandon them to their fate[b]. He then takes two staves or wands, one of which he called Beauty, and the other, Bands; and in their presence cut asunder the one that was designated by the name of Beauty, in order to intimate, that their whole Ecclesiastical polity, which was the beauty and glory of the whole world, should be dissolved[c]. Obscure as this intimation was, it was understood by the poor, the humble and the pious, who trembled at the voice of the Lord[d]. The other stick, named Bands, represented the Civil polity of the Jews: and before he proceeded to cut asunder that also, and to declare the utter destruction of the whole nation, he made one more effort in their favour, and desired the Chief Priests and Elders to signify their regard for his services by such a pecuniary tender as they deemed adequate to their value. They, in compliance with this demand, weighed out to him thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave[e]. Upon this, the Lord, full of indignation against them for so undervaluing his richest mercies, ordered the prophet to cast the money to a potter who happened to be in the temple, and then to cut asunder the other staff, in token of his giving them

[a] ver. 1—3, 6. [b] ver. 9. [c] ver. 10. [d] ver. 11. [e] Exod. xxi. 32.

them up to intestine commotions and to utter destruction[f].

But the whole of this transaction had respect also to other times, and other circumstances; and must be understood,

I. As a prophetic intimation—

The prophet was a type of that great and good Shepherd, who was in due time to come into the world, and "to lay down his life for the sheep:" and the treatment which he received, was typical of what should afterwards be accomplished by the Jews of later days in reference to their Messiah.

How exactly it was accomplished, the New Testament will inform us—

[When Judas conceived the design of betraying his Lord, he bargained with the chief priests, who offered him this precise sum, thirty pieces of silver, which he took accordingly, as the price of the Redeemer's blood[g]. After he had betrayed his Lord, he went to return them their money: and finding that they would not regard his overtures, he cast down the money in the temple, and went and hanged himself. And what did they with the money? They would not put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood; but, after consultation had, they bought with it a potter's field, to bury strangers in: and thus, as an inspired Apostle informs us, fulfilled what had so many hundred years before been predicted respecting them[h].]

From this minute accomplishment of it we derive most important instruction—

[Mark how many circumstances in this extraordinary transaction concurred to fulfil the prophecy: *The person whose services were so valued;* the good Shepherd. *The price fixed;* thirty pieces of silver. *The application of the money;* given to a potter. *The spot where the transaction took place;* the Temple of the Lord. *The persons chiefly concerned in it;* the priests and elders. All this was predicted, in order to attest the truth of Christ's Messiahship. And was there any concert, think you, to fulfil the prophecy? Did Judas and the chief priests commune together, to prove beyond a possibility of doubt that Jesus was the person to whom all the Law and the Prophets bare witness as the Saviour of the world? Behold then, from one proof out of an hundred, on how firm a basis our faith is fixed!

Nor is the accomplishment of this prophecy instructive only *as confirming*

[f] ver. 13, 14. [g] Matt. xxvi. 14—16. [h] Matt. xxvii. 3—10.

confirming our faith: it goes much farther, and *gives us an insight into all God's dispensations, whether of providence or grace.*

God has ordered every thing, both in heaven and earth, both in time and eternity. But are men therefore to be considered as mere passive instruments in his hands? No: they are free agents in all that they do. The chief priests sought only the gratification of their own malice, as Judas did of his own covetous desires: neither the one nor the other acted from any impulse but of their own hearts. The spot where the transaction took place, the presence of a potter, the circumstance of his having a field of the precise value to sell, with various other circumstances, were all, as we should call them, accidental: but God foresaw all, and foreordained to accomplish his own will by means of all. And this shews us how God's decrees respecting the salvation of his people are accomplished. Men are not at all the less free because of his decrees; nor are the decrees of God the less certain because of man's free agency. There are ten thousand minute and accidental circumstances, as we should call them, necessary, as links in the chain of God's purposes: but not one shall be wanting; not one shall fail; nor shall one jot or tittle of God's word ever pass away. The responsibility of man will be precisely the same as if God had made no decrees: and the termination of events will be the same, as if God himself had produced them without the agency of man. With respect to man, all is uncertain: but with respect to God, all is as fixed, as if it were already done: "His counsel shall stand; and he will do all his will." Deep as these truths are, they are not at all inconsistent with each other: and if men will only mark in what way the prophecies have been fulfilled, they will have a key to all the difficulties which have embarrased, and incensed against each other, the whole Christian world.]

But the transaction in our text must be yet further viewed,

II. As an emblematic act—

It was foretold by Isaiah, that the Messiah should be "despised and rejected of men[1]." But was it by the men of one generation only that he was to be so treated? No; but by men of every nation, and of every age. It is indeed humiliating to think that the prophecy in our text has been fulfilled in us: but it is not more humiliating than true. Consider,

1. What we have done to obtain an interest in Christ—

[After the things of this world we have burned with most intense desire: pleasure, riches, honour, have been in such request,

[1] Isai. liii. 2, 3.

quest, that no measure of attainment of them could ever satisfy us: but after the knowledge of Christ we have felt no such longings: a small measure would satisfy us at any time: and we could be quite content to leave it in doubt whether he were our friend or not. Anxieties and disappointments in abundance we have felt in relation to earthly things; but not in reference to him; because it has been a matter of indifference to us, whether we possessed an interest in him or not. For earthly things we could consume the midnight oil, or encounter perils and fatigues: but an hour spent in prayer, in our secret chamber, has been a labour too irksome for us to endure. Whole years have passed; and not a single day been devoted by us to fasting and prayer for the obtaining of his salvation. Such a price as this has appeared an unreasonable demand; nor could we ever be prevailed upon to pay it: a faint wish, or formal service, has been the full amount of the estimate which we have set on His love. How justly then may God reject us with indignation, saying, "A goodly price truly is this at which I have been prized of you!"]

2. What we have been willing to suffer for him—

[Great are the sacrifices which we have made for the poor vanities of time and sense: but what have we sacrificed for the Lord? Paul counted not his life dear to him, so that he might but honour and glorify his Lord: but we have felt no such constraining sense of his excellency, no such disposition to part with all for him. An interest equivalent to the purchase of a potter's field has been at any time a sufficient barrier in our way to obstruct our progress, and prevent us from confessing him openly before men. It is really grievous to think how little we have been willing to bear for him. A frown, a threat, an ignominious name, have been quite sufficient to intimidate us; when, if we had valued Christ aright, ten thousand worlds, would, in comparison of him, have weighed no more with us than the dust upon the balance.]

3. What efforts we have made for promoting his glory in the world—

[The Apostles and primitive Christians counted not their lives dear to them, so that they might but diffuse the knowledge of his salvation. And thus it should be with us. Our hearts should be ever intent on that object: we should never lose sight of it: we should live altogether for it. But, alas! how inactive have we been in his service! We have seen millions perishing for lack of knowledge, and used scarcely any means for their instruction. We have seen the kingdom of Christ invaded and usurped by the prince of darkness, and put forth no efforts to bring it to its rightful Owner. Say, would it have been thus, if we had valued him as we ought? Would the advancement of his glory have been so light a matter in our eyes, if we had formed a just estimate of his kingdom and glory? Surely God has had too much reason to cast

cast this reflection upon us, "A goodly price it was that I was prized at by them." And all our worthless services he may well cast away with indignation, as unworthy his acceptance, and fit only for the purchase of a potter's field.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are indifferent about Christ—

[Can it be so, that there should be any found of this description? Alas! they constitute the great mass, not of Heathens only, but of those who name the name of Christ. But will it be so always? Will it be so when you get into the eternal world? You can sleep now like the foolish virgins: but will you not in that day, when excluded from the marriage-feast, cry, Lord, Lord, open unto us? Yes: you will then at least form a correct estimate, if you will not now: but I pray God you may learn to do it now, whilst it may be available for your good, and not wait till you shall know his value only by your loss. Better to know him by the manifestations of his love, than by the terrors of his avenging arm.]

2. Those who desire to obtain an interest in him—

[Be ready to pay the price which your God demands. The wise Merchant, when he has found this pearl of great price, will sell *all* to procure it. And this is what our blesesd Lord himself requires at your hands. You must "forsake *all*, and follow him:" you must not love father or mother more than him. You must even "*hate* father and mother, yea, and your own life also," in comparison of him. He must have no rival in your estimation. There must be nothing which you will not do for him; nothing which you will not sacrifice. Be not like the Rich Youth, who renounced him rather than his wealth. The greater the sacrifices you make, the more must you account them grounds only of self-congratulation, and of joy[k]. O beg of God the Spirit to reveal him in your hearts; and so to make his glory pass before your eyes, that you may henceforth have no wish but to enjoy his presence, and to glorify his name!]

3. Those who profess that they do already possess this inestimable treasure—

[Take care that you be not robbed of it. Satan will leave nothing undone to prevail against you. How he has prevailed over others, let the history of Demas inform you. Do not imagine, that because the world is as nothing to you now, it will always appear so vain and worthless. No: a change of circumstances often produces a change of views and habits. What changes may await you, God alone knows: but oh! pray that there may never be a change in your regards for Christ, unless indeed that he may be increasingly precious in your eyes, and that your

[k] Phil. ii. 17.

your devotion to him may be more entire. And be assured that in the eternal world it will be no grief to you that you did too much for him, or suffered too much for him. Let it be to you "Christ to live; and it will in due time be gain to die."]

DCL.

CHRIST SMITTEN FOR OUR SINS.

Zech. xiii. 7. *Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.*

THIS is generally thought to be the beginning of a distinct prophecy: yet it seems not only to be connected with, but in a measure to arise out of, the preceding context. The connexion, it is true, is not obvious: but it must be remembered, that this is the way in which some of the most important predictions in all the Scriptures are introduced. Take, for instance, the prophecy that Christ should be born of a pure virgin; a more wonderful event than which is not predicted in all the Inspired Volume: there was no necessary connexion between that, and the destruction of the ten tribes; nor between that, and the obstinate incredulity of Ahab: yet, on Ahab's declining to ask a sign that the deliverance promised to Judah should speedily be accomplished, the Lord gave him this sign; "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel[a]." In that prophecy, the event predicted, appeared wholly foreign to the subject that was in hand: but in the prophecy before us it is not so. The chapter begins with a plain declaration, that in due time Christ, by the shedding of his blood upon the cross, should open unto mankind "a fountain to wash them from sin and uncleanness." It then goes on to say, that by him idolatry should be destroyed; and that both men and women, if tempted to idolatry by their own children, should immediately execute judgment upon them, and thrust them

[a] Isai. vii. 10—14.

them through with a sword or dart[b]: and that so general should be men's abhorrence of idolatry, that those who had been disposed towards it, and had even marked their bodies in honour of their idols, should deny their having ever felt any disposition towards it, and should ascribe the marks that were on their flesh to some "wounds which they had received, either accidentally, or for some particular purpose, in the house of their friends."

Then in our text God says, As the false prophet shall be *slain by his own father* for endeavouring to turn you from God, so shall the true prophet be *slain by his father* in order to turn you to God: "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts."

In discoursing on these words, we shall consider,

I. The commission given to Jehovah's sword—

It is bidden to "awake and smite:" but here two questions arise;

1. Whom was it to smite—

[It was assuredly the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone answers to the character here described. He is "the Shepherd of Israel," appointed to that office by God himself[c]. He designates himself by that very name, and as the person to be smitten under that very character[d]. Moreover, he alone can be called "Jehovah's fellow:" for he was God as well as man[e], even the true God[f], the mighty God[g], altogether One with the Father himself[h]: "God over all, blessed for ever;" and being God in his own nature, and therefore incapable of suffering, he assumed our nature on purpose that he might suffer[i].]

2. In whose hand was it to inflict the stroke?

[It was the Father himself who was to wield it, even he who here calls upon it to arise and smite. True it was that men and devils were the more immediate agents[k]; but they were only instruments in the Father's hands: "they could have had no power at all against him, if it had not been given them from above." They were willing agents, no doubt, and executed what their own malignant dispositions dictated: but God over-ruled their designs for the accomplishment of his own eternal purposes[l]. There

[b] This was agreeable to the law of Moses; Deut. xiii. 6—10.
[c] Ps. lxxx. 1. Ezek. xxxiv. 23.
[d] John x. 11.
[e] John i. 1.
[f] 1 John v. 20.
[g] Isai. ix. 6.
[h] John x. 30.
[i] Phil. ii. 6—8.
[k] Luke xxii. 53.
[l] Acts ii. 23. & iv. 28.

There was not one thing done by them which had not been foretold; nor one thing predicted, which they did not unwittingly and exactly perform [m].

But even without the intervention either of men or devils the Father himself smote him. What was it but a sense of God's wrath upon his soul that made him sweat great drops of blood in the garden? It was the Father himself who put that bitter cup into his hands. Upon the cross too, when Jesus uttered no complaints respecting inferior agents, he bitterly bewailed the hidings of his Father's face: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus was verified that awful prediction of the prophet, "It pleased the Lord, even Jehovah himself, to bruise him [n]."]

Let us next inquire into,

II. The grounds and reasons of this commission—

It was the Father's purpose to exercise mercy towards our fallen race: but he would do it in a way that should be consistent with his own perfections. Hence he gave us his only-begotten Son to be our Substitute and Surety: and against him, when standing in that capacity, he called forth the sword;

1. To shew his indignation against sin—

[We presume not to say what God *might* have done, if it had pleased him: but we are sure that "it *became* him, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their Salvation perfect through sufferings [o]." As the Moral Governor of the Universe, it *became* him to vindicate the honour of his broken law, and to mark his utter abhorrence of iniquity: and this he did more strongly and effectually in smiting his only-begotten Son, than if he had smitten the whole human race. As for the children of men, they are but worms of the earth, far inferior to the angels that fell: but Christ was his co-equal, co-eternal Son, his fellow, his equal. O what an evil must sin be, when God would not suffer it to pass unpunished even in the person of his own Son, on whom it was found only by imputation! We may be well assured, that, on whomsoever it be found in the last day, it will be visited with "wrath to the uttermost."]

2. To reconcile justice with mercy in the salvation of sinners—

[Had sin been pardoned without any atonement, the claims of justice must have been superseded. But God would not exalt mercy at the expense of justice; and therefore he devised a way of satisfying the demands of justice, whilst he listened with complacency

[m] John xix. 28, 30. [n] Isai. liii. 10. [o] Heb. ii. 10.

placency to the voice of mercy. "He laid our iniquities upon" his only dear Son, and exacted of him the debt which had been incurred by us; and that debt he paid to the uttermost farthing; so that justice itself has nothing more to require of us, provided only we plead what Christ has done and suffered in our behalf. Thus has God become "a just God and a Saviour," or, as St. Paul expresses it, he is "just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus."]

Such being the reasons for this mysterious commission, we proceed to notice,

III. The effects and consequences of it—

The *immediate* effect was the scattering of our Lord's Disciples—

[One would have thought, that our Lord's more intimate Disciples, who for above three years had heard all his discourses, and seen all his miracles, would have firmly adhered to him, even to the end; more especially as they had promised, in the most solemn manner, to follow him, even unto death: but God, who knew what was in man, foretold, that they would shamefully desert him in the hour of trial: yea, our Lord himself forewarned his Disciples that they would forsake him, and thereby fulfil the prophecy in our text[p]: and the event, alas! corresponded with these predictions: the "Shepherd being smitten, the sheep were immediately scattered abroad;" "they all forsook him and fled." What a poignancy must this circumstance have given to all the other wounds inflicted on our Lord! Where were all the myriads whom he had miraculously healed? Where were those whom he had raised from the dead? Were they all afraid to own him? Was not so much as one found to stand forth in his defence, or even to speak a word in his behalf? *No*: all were panic-struck and mute. Hear how our blessed Lord himself complains of this, as a bitter aggravation of his sorrows[r]. But utter dereliction, unmitigated sorrows, was our desert; and he, as our substitute, endured it in our behalf.]

The *ultimate* effect was their restoration and recovery—

[This is intimated in the last clause of our text. By "*turning his hand upon* his little ones," is meant, that he would accomplish upon them all his merciful designs, recovering them from their fears, and restoring them to the Divine favour[s]. This he did as soon as ever he was risen from the dead: he did not even except Peter, who had so shamefully denied him with oaths and curses[t]. On the day of Pentecost he so "strengthened his little ones," that they were henceforth no more intimidated, but boldly confessed him before all the Rulers of their nation, and braved death in all its

[p] Matt. xxvi. 31. [q] ib. ver. 56. [r] Ps. lxix. 20. & cxlii. 4.
[s] Compare Isai. i. 25. [t] Mark xvi. 7. John xx. 17.

its most tremendous forms, for the honour of his name. Similar effects were instantly produced on thousands of his followers: and to this hour is the same divine energy communicated to the feeblest of his people; though but "a little flock," they fear not the threats of any adversaries, because they know that it "is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom;" and, that they shall be "more than conquerors through Him that loved them."

Such were intended to be the effects of our Redeemer's death: "He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God:" and to God he will bring us; so that "of those whom the Father hath given him, not one shall be lost."]

IMPROVEMENT.—Let us take occasion, from this prophecy,

1. To admire the love of God the Father—

[When God called to his sword to "awake and smite," whom should we suppose to be the objects of his vengeance? Should we not conclude of course that *we* were to be the monuments of his wrath? *we*, towards whom he had so long exercised forbearance, and who had so obstinately persisted in our rebellion? Yes, methinks God would say, "Sword, go and smite those my incorrigible enemies; go and smite them to their inmost soul." But, behold, he sends his Son, "his Fellow," and directs the sword to execute vengeance upon him, as our Substitute! O wondrous love! Who can estimate it? What tongue can utter it? What imagination can conceive it? Well is it said, "God so *loved* the world, as to give his only-begotten Son:" but the heights and depths of that love are unsearchable, either by men or angels.]

2. To follow the steps of the good Shepherd—

[Jesus, Jehovah's Fellow, is our Shepherd; and we, as sheep of his pasture, are under his protection. Let us then, however weak in ourselves, despise the threats of all our enemies. Let us never for a moment indulge the fear of man; or entertain a thought of forsaking him who has laid down his life for us. Let us consider our obligations to him: let us consider them, till we feel our whole souls inflamed with love to him; and, under the constraining influence of his love, let us "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach," and "rejoicing, if we are counted worthy to suffer shame, or even death itself, for his sake." Let us "know in whom we have believed;" and say with David "The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want;" nor "will I fear what man can do unto me."]

3. To seek the effectual influence of his grace—

[What shall we not be able to do, if "he turn his hand upon us for good?" Could Paul say, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me?" so then may *we* say. He was

by

by nature no stronger than the weakest amongst us: and the weakest of us, by grace, may be as strong as he: "Christ's strength shall be perfected in our weakness," as it was in his. Let our eyes then be unto Jesus; that, as he has been "the author, so also he may be the finisher, of our faith." Let our expectations from him be enlarged: and, whatever our difficulties be, let us remember, that "our Redeemer is mighty," is almighty; and that he has pledged himself to us, that "none shall ever pluck us out of his hands."]

DCLI.

THE MILLENNIAL GLORY.

Zech. xiv. 20, 21. *In that day shall there be on the bells of the horses,* HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD: *and the pots in the Lord's House shall be like the bowls before the altar: yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of Hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the House of the Lord of Hosts.*

THE period to which the text refers is yet future. If there be in the preceding context much that is difficult to be understood, there is much also that is plain. It is here plainly foretold, that the Jews shall be restored once more to their own land[a]: that those who oppose their settlement there, how numerous or powerful soever they may be, shall be destroyed[b]: that both Jews and Gentiles shall embrace the faith of Christ[c]: that those who refuse to do so, whether Jews or Gentiles, shall be visited with heavy plagues[d]; and that, amongst those who do turn unto the Lord, there shall be such high degrees of holiness as have never yet been generally found in the Church of God[e].

By "the bells or bridles of the horses" may be meant the ornaments of horses, not merely of those used in war, but rather of those used for common purposes, whether of labour or pleasure. On them shall be inscribed "HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD," just as there was on the mitre of the high priest[f], in order to shew, that the owners of the horses consider them as consecrated to the Lord, and desire to glorify God in the use of them.

[a] ver. 11. [b] ver. 12—15. [c] ver. 9.
[d] ver. 16—19. [e] The text. [f] Exod. xxviii. 36.

them. By this I understand, that, in all the comforts and conveniences of life, God will be acknowledged, as much as he formerly was in the most sacred ordinances and appointments.

Every service then will be, in fact, a religious service. In the Tabernacle and the Temple were "pots," both of earth and brass, for the use of the priests; and "bowls" of gold for the blood of the sacrifices, which was to be sprinkled according to the prescribed forms. These were more holy, as being used in the more immediate service of God. But in that day, "the pots in the Lord's House shall be like the bowls before the altar," every meal being partaken of in the same devout spirit as a sacrifice, and every common office of life being performed as unto God himself. Nor will this obtain amongst the priests only, but amongst the people also, and that of every rank and order in society; for "every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord." The seething of the flesh of the sacrifices in the pots formerly belonged only to the priests[g]: but under the Christian dispensation all are priests, even "a royal priesthood[h]," and are therefore entitled to "seethe therein;" "the people who sacrifice" being in this respect as the priests themselves.

So universal will holiness then be, that "there will no more be the Canaanite in the House of the Lord." In the Promised Land the Canaanites retained a possession for many centuries, and were with great difficulty extirpated at last. At this time too there are in the Church many who dishonour their holy profession; nor can the tares be in any tolerable degree separated from the wheat; but at that day "Jerusalem shall be altogether holy[i]," and in the Lord's highway no unclean thing or person shall be found[k].

From the text thus explained, we may see,

I. The true character of the Gospel dispensation—

The law was holy; and not the moral law only, but the ceremonial law also: for though, in comparison of the Gospel, it consisted only of poor and "beggarly elements,"

[g] Lev. vi. 25—28.
[h] 1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. v. 10.
[i] Joel iii. 17.
[k] Isai. xxxv. 8. & lx. 21.

elements," yet it tended to render sin odious, and to impress on the mind the fear and love of God. But the Gospel is yet more holy, being itself the substance of those things, of which the law was only a shadow. The whole character of it is holiness:

1. It displays above all things the holiness of God—

[See what an atonement was offered for sin! nothing but the blood of God's only dear Son could make satisfaction for it——— What a holy God must *he* be, who required such a sacrifice!———]

2. It proposes to us no lower pattern than God himself—

[We are required by it to "be holy, as God is holy;" and "perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."—Far as we are from this, we must press forward for it, and rest in nothing short of it ———]

3. The holiness which it requires of us, it promises to us—

[It makes not any one perfect in this life; but it delivers us from the dominion of all sin, and transforms us into "the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness," and *that* "from one degree of glory to another, by the Spirit of the Lord[l]." This it does for all who receive it aright: for "every one that has a good hope in Christ, purifies himself, even as he is pure[m]" ———]

To illustrate this yet farther, we shall mark,

II. The effect which it produces, in proportion as its influence is felt—

"It bringeth forth fruit in all the world:" and that fruit is of the richest kind, even as the fruit of Paradise itself. In the last day it will operate in its full extent: and now, if we cordially embrace it,

1. We shall regard all that we have as consecrated to the Lord—

[Whatever we possess, whether for use or pleasure, "Holiness unto the Lord" will be inscribed upon it. [n] Our bodies with all their members, our souls with all their faculties, our time, our property, our influence, all will be considered as talents received from him, and to be improved for him [n].]

2. We shall perform our most common services in a religious manner—

[As the ungodly carry a worldly spirit into their most sacred duties, so, on the contrary, do the saints endeavour to do every thing

[l] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [m] 1 John iii. 3. [n] Isaiah xxiii. 18. & lxiii. 9.

thing for God. This is shewn us particularly in reference to religious servants, whose privilege it is in the most menial offices to serve the Lord Christ[o]— — —In like manner all of us are to regard "our pots and cups as the bowls before the altar," and "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do it all for the glory of God[p]."]

3. We shall suffer no sin willingly to abide in our hearts—

[The Canaanite will be expelled, and no truce be made with him. "The right eye will be plucked out, and the right hand or foot will be cut off." To the harbouring of one sin the penalty of "hell fire" is annexed: and no candidate for heaven will knowingly subject himself to this fearful alternative[q].]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none be ashamed of religion, which ought to shine before men — — —

2. Let none rest in any measure of religion short of that which will characterize the Millennial age — — —

[o] Eph. vi. 5—8. [p] 1 Cor. x. 31. [q] Mark ix. 42—48.

DCLII.

RELATIVE DUTIES TO GOD AND MAN.

Mal. i. 6. *A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?* saith the Lord of Hosts.

THE unfolding and enforcing of relative duties, is a very essential branch of the Christian Ministry; and conducive, in a variety of views, to the most important ends. If indeed the whole of religion were made to consist in the performance of those duties, or if men were urged to perform them in their own strength, or with an hope of meriting God's favour, then the foundations of Christianity would be sapped, and the whole fabric would fall to ruin. But, if they be set forth in order to shew to the ungodly their transgressions, and their consequent need of mercy; or if they be inculcated on the Believer in order that he may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; no subject can be more weighty, or more deserving of our attention. But there

is

is yet another view, in which the consideration of them may subserve the best of purposes. Men, however disposed they may be to limit the extent of their own duties, are easily led to acknowledge the obligations of others towards themselves. Hence, there being always a number of persons interested in discovering their own rights, and disposed to insist upon them; and every person having risen, or hoping to rise, from a subordinate relation to one invested with authority; the duties of every distinct relation are ascertained and approved. This is not the case with respect to the duties of men towards God. The authority there is all on one side, and obedience is wholly on the other. Hence all men feeling the same desire to limit and curtail the rights of their Governor, and to extend the boundaries of their own liberty, the laws of God are almost entirely superseded: disobedience to them is universally connived at, as though it were no evil; and the general welfare of society is made the ground and measure of all morality. Here then the relative duties may be introduced to great advantage: these being already admitted, serve as acknowledged principles, from whence we may argue; and the application of them to the duties of the first table is obvious and irresistible. This use of them God himself has taught us, as in many other passages, so especially in that before us; in illustrating which we shall propose for your consideration the following observations:

I. There is no duty of earthly dependents towards their superiors, which does not exist in an infinitely higher degree towards the Governor of the Universe.

II. However attentive men are to fill up their duties in domestic life, they are universally prone to neglect their duties towards God.

III. The performance of duties towards men, instead of extenuating, as many suppose, the guilt of neglecting God, is in reality a great aggravation of it.

I. There is no duty of earthly dependents towards their superiors, which does not exist in an infinitely higher degree towards the Governor of the Universe—

Reason,

Reason, no less than Revelation, teaches us that a child owes subjection to his parent, and a servant to his master: nor is there any one so depraved as to controvert this general position, however indisposed he may be to act conformably to it in his own particular situation. What the laws of nature inculcate in the one case, is established by a particular compact in the other: and an habitual infringement of it is considered as a subversion of social order, and an inlet to universal anarchy. Still however there are limits, beyond which no human authority extends: and, when these are exceeded, resistance, rather than obedience, is our duty. But God's claim to honour and obedience knows no bounds. He is, in some sense, the Father of our bodies, which could not exist without his creating hand: but in a more eminent manner is he "the Father of our spirits;" because he forms them without the intervention of human agency, and endues them with powers, which matter could not generate. Being the Creator of all, he is also, of necessity, the Lord of all; to whom every faculty and every power should be consecrated. The honour which we pay to parents is but a faint shadow of that reverence, with which we are to approach him, and of that profound respect, which we are to entertain for his person and character, his word and will. The obedience which we yield to earthly superiors, relates chiefly to outward acts: but God has a right to controul our inmost thoughts. We are to believe every thing he says, because he says it; to love every thing he does, because he does it; and to execute every thing he enjoins, because he commands it. We not only may, but must, inquire into the injunctions of men, whether they be right in themselves, and whether a compliance with them be agreeable to the mind and will of God? But there is no room for such questions respecting any of the commands of God. If God say, "Abraham, take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up; slay him with thine own hand, and consume him to ashes;" there is no room for deliberation: Abraham has no right to gainsay the decree of Heaven; he is not at liberty to offer

offer any objections: it is sufficient for him to know what the will of his Maker is; and then he must perform it instantly, without reluctance. Had the command been given by an earthly superior, there had been ample ground for hesitation, for expostulation, for disobedience: no parental, no magisterial authority should be regarded in such a case. But against a Divine command there never can be any ground for the exercise of carnal reason: a prompt, a steady, a determined acquiescence on our part, is our truest wisdom, and our bounden duty. Our obedience however is not to be that of a slave to an imperious and cruel master, but like that of a dutiful child to an affectionate and beloved parent. We ourselves consider the mind and disposition with which we are served, as affecting very materially the acceptableness of the service itself. That which is done for us grudgingly, and through mere constraint, is of very little value in our eyes: it is the willing, cheerful obedience that engages our esteem, and endears to us the persons actuated by such a spirit. Similar to this is the service which God requires. He justly expects that we should be like "the angels, hearkening to the voice of his word," and waiting for the slightest intimations of his will, in order to execute it with all possible readiness and dispatch. We should come into his presence with the confidence of beloved children: we should ask from time to time, "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" We should set about the duties of our calling as regularly as the most diligent servant prosecutes his accustomed labours: we should never think any thing done, as long as there remains any thing to be done. If an arduous service occur, we should not draw back from it, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel; but should rather address ourselves to it with increased energy, and regard it as a favourable opportunity of displaying our zeal and love. If we could be freed from his yoke, we should decline the proffered liberty, and, like the servant under the law, request that our ear might be fastened to the door post, in token that we account his service to be perfect freedom, and that it is our desire to continue in it to the latest hour of our lives. We should find our reward in

our

our work, and our happiness in honouring and enjoying God. We may indeed without impropriety "have respect also to the recompence of the reward," which we shall receive in another world: but our principal incentives should be of a more disinterested and ingenuous nature: we should perform the will of God, because we love the very things which he prescribes; and because it is our highest ambition to please and glorify him.

But truth compels us to observe,

II. That, however attentive men are to fill up their duties in domestic life, they are universally prone to neglect their duties towards God—

Amidst all the depravity which has deluged the world, there may be found in many instances a conscientious regard to relative duties. If some have reason to complain of disobedient children and unfaithful servants, others can testify, that the persons so related to them are deserving of the highest commendations on account of their fidelity and affection. Even where spiritual religion is overlooked and despised, this attention to relative duties frequently obtains. A good natural disposition, united with a sense of honour and a regard to interest, will often produce habits, which may provoke to emulation those, who profess to be actuated by the sublimer principles of the Gospel.

But where, except among the despised followers of Jesus, shall we find those who fulfil their duties to God? That many are punctual in some outward observances, is readily acknowledged. But we shall do well to remark, that the inquiry in my text does not relate to outward actions so much as to the inward dispositions of the mind; "If I be a Father, where is my *honour?* and if I be a Master, where is my *fear?* saith the Lord of Hosts." Let our attention then be directed to this point: let us, in our self-examination, keep this in view. Has there been in our hearts an habitual fear of offending God? Has there been a holy reverential awe upon our minds whenever we have entered into his presence? Has there been an unwearied solicitude to please him, and a determination through grace to

prove

prove ourselves faithful to him in all things? Have we sought carefully to know his will; and then set ourselves diligently to perform it? Have we been afraid of wasting his time in vain unprofitable pursuits, and endeavoured to lay out to advantage the talents he has committed to our care? Have we together with the fidelity of a servant combined the love and confidence of a child? Have we entered into his presence with joy, and made known our requests with a humble yet thankful assurance, that he would hear and answer our petitions? Have we cast our care upon him, not doubting but that he would care for us, and order every thing for our good? Have we, at the same time, taken an interest in every thing that relates to him? Have we been filled with grief and indignation, when we have beheld the contempt poured upon him by an ungodly world? And has it been a source of lively joy, if at any time we have heard his name exalted and his glory extolled? If we have felt towards him as duteous children, we must have considered ourselves as having a communion of interests with him; and must have participated in all those emotions, which the advancement or declension of his cause are suited to inspire.

Let us examine in this manner the conduct both of ourselves and others, and then answer, if we can, that pointed interrogation, "*Where* is mine honour?" Blind and partial as we are, we cannot be so blind or so partial, as not to confess, that, however attentive men may be to their relative duties, they are not mindful of their duty to God. There is doubtless a considerable difference between some and others: some have respect for religion, while others despise it; and some endeavour in a self-righteous way to please God, while others care not how much they provoke him to anger. But, as to the dispositions of a faithful servant and a dutiful child, there is not a person in the universe who feels them, except the few who have "entered in at the strait gate, and are walking in the narrow path" of evangelical obedience. All others prefer their own ease to God's service, their own will to God's precepts, their own interests to God's honour.

And

And what shall we say to these things? Shall we leave men to imagine that their punctuality in some duties will atone for their remissness in others? No: we must rather say—(what indeed we proposed as the IIId head of our discourse)—

That the performance of duties towards men, instead of extenuating, as many suppose, the guilt of neglecting God, is in reality a great aggravation of it—

In one view indeed it must certainly be allowed, that the fewer laws any man transgresses, the less guilt he contracts: and that therefore he who obeys, though imperfectly and exclusively, the injunctions of the second table, is better than he who lives in the unrestrained violation of *all* the commandments. Nevertheless it is certain that obedience in some cases may be a great aggravation of our disobedience in others; inasmuch as it may argue a preference given to the creature above the Creator, and may therefore excite the fiercer indignation of a jealous God. More especially, if the duties of the second table be exalted to the neglect of those of the first table, and obedience to the latter be pleaded as excusing our transgressions of the former, then our partiality becomes an awful aggravation of our guilt.* For, what is this, but to raise altar against altar, to set God at variance with himself, and to "provoke to jealousy" the Holy One of Israel? We can scarcely conceive any thing worse than such conduct as this. For, shall God be denied the honour which is paid to man? Shall he alone be treated with contemptuous neglect? Shall he be excluded from the minds of those whom he created and upholds? Shall all the wonders of redeeming love be requited in no better way than this? Shall we refuse to him the homage which we exact from our fellow-creatures, and which we even pay to those who are authorized to receive it? Would not God be justly indignant, if he were only placed on a footing of equality with men? How much more then, when he is degraded so far below them! Surely every mercy he has ever vouchsafed to us, but especially the gift of his dear Son, will dreadfully enhance our guilt and condemnation, if our obligations to him do not operate

to

to produce in us a reverential honour of him as our Father, and an unrivalled obedience to him as our Lord and Master.

This mode of arguing is very common in the Scriptures. God is pleased frequently to suggest the relation subsisting between himself and his people with the same view as in the passage before us. Sometimes he does it to raise *our expectations from him;* and at other times to shew the reasonableness of *his expectations from us.* In the former view he says, "Which of you, if his child should ask for bread, would give him a stone? How much more then will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him." In the latter view he says, "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of Spirits, and live?" Precisely thus does he speak in the text; with this only difference, that the conclusion drawn from his statement is not merely an appeal to our reason, but a reproof for our misconduct. The interrogations are extremely pointed: they intimate a mind justly incensed: they express the highest indignation against us for refusing to our Maker what we concede to our fellow-worms: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a Father, where is MINE honour? if I be a Master, where is MY fear? saith the Lord of Hosts."

We shall more easily enter into this idea, if we suppose a child or servant of our own fulfilling his duties with some considerable care to others, but violating all which he owed to us. If his attention to others were adduced in vindication of his neglect of us, should we not argue in the very same way that Jehovah does in the text? Should we be satisfied with his serving others, when he withheld his services from *us?* Should we not insist upon our superior title to his regards? Should we not represent the violations of his duty to us as more heinous, in proportion to the right which was vested in us by virtue of our relation to him? When he told us of what he did for others, should we not say, "But where is *my* honour? where is *my* fear?"

fear?" Should we not consider his conduct as in the highest degree insolent and contemptuous, when we ourselves, who had an exclusive, or at least a superior, claim to his affection, were particularly selected as objects of his neglect? There can be no doubt: and therefore we may be well assured, that the very pleas which we are apt to urge in extenuation of our guilt, will one day be adduced as the greatest aggravations of it.

Permit me now to ask a question or two, in reference to the foregoing subject. Supposing that God should now call us to account, as certainly he will ere long, and ask, What proofs we have given of our allegiance to him? What proofs have we to adduce? Can we appeal to the heart-searching God, that we have indeed respected his authority, that we have habitually conducted ourselves towards him as faithful servants and obedient children? Let us examine well our own hearts: let us not be hasty to conclude that all is well: it is easy to deceive ourselves; but we cannot possibly deceive God. Every act of our lives has been registered in the book of his remembrance; and we shall be judged, not by the partial verdict of our own self-love, but by the unerring testimony of truth itself. And if it be proved that our allegiance to God amounted to no more than "saying, Lord! Lord! without doing the things which he commanded," our Judge will pronounce upon us that awful sentence, "Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity!"

We cannot however conclude this subject, without suggesting some consolatory considerations to those who are conscious of having neglected God. Our God and Father does not instantly disinherit the rebellious child, or exclude for ever the disobedient servant: Onesimus may yet return, through the mediation of his heavenly Sponsor; and the Prodigal may yet be feasted on the fatted calf. Only let us confess our sins, and turn to God with humiliation and contrition; and we shall soon find, that "he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." Let us, like the penitents under the law, lay our hands upon the head of our Great Sacrifice, and transfer our guilt to Him, who taketh

taketh away the sins of the world. Then shall we have no cause to fear the displeasure of an angry God: our iniquities shall be forgiven, and our sins be covered: and though unworthy in ourselves to obtain the smallest mercy, we shall be dealt with, not as servants merely, but as sons, and be made partakers of an everlasting inheritance.

DCLIII.

THE CALLING OF THE GENTILES.

Mal. i. 11. *From the rising of the sun, even unto the going-down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles: and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the Heathen, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

THROUGHOUT all the Prophetic writings we shall find the predicted abandonment of the Jews followed by a promise respecting the future call of the Gentiles. It should seem as if God intended by this to provoke his people to jealousy, according as he had before intimated by Moses, in order that by any means he might stir them up to deprecate his threatened judgments. In the passage before us, Jehovah complains of the extreme impiety of the Jewish nation. Amongst the priests themselves, who should have been an example to others, such was the selfishness and utter destitution of every religious principle, that none were to be found who would even shut the Temple doors for nought, or kindle a fire upon his altar but for their own temporal advantage. God therefore tells them, that he would "no more accept an offering at *their* hands." But would he therefore be destitute of a people, and be forgotten in the world? No: "*for*" he would take to himself a people from among the Heathen, amongst whom such offerings should be presented to him as he would accept, and "his name," which the Jewish people had so dishonoured and despised, "should be great among them to the ends of the earth." Thus would he make their apostacy subservient to the good of others, or, as St. Paul expresses it, "the fall of the Jews

should

should be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them should be the riches of the Gentiles[a]."

In further considering this prophecy, I shall notice,

I. What is implied in it—

We may see here, by implication,

1. The intended abolition of the Mosaic law—

[Sacrifices and incense were to be offered at Jerusalem alone, and in the Temple, in which God has chosen to place his name there[b]. But in the prophecy before us it is intimated, that incense and offerings should be presented to the Lord in *every* place; which could not be without a disannulling of the commandment before given. Of course, with this one commandment must the whole law be abrogated, because the whole priestly office, in all its most important operations, would be superseded. Nor is this an inference of mine only: it is drawn by an inspired Apostle from premises precisely similar. God had foretold, by David, that a new order of priesthood should arise, even one after the order of Melchizedec. This would of necessity militate against, and supersede, the established priesthood; that which was predicted being to arise from the tribe of Judah, whilst that which had been established was confined to the tribe of Levi. From hence the Apostle infers the total abolition of the Levitical priesthood, and of the whole law with which it was connected[c]: and the same inference is plainly deducible from the prediction contained in our text.

This observation shews how mistaken the Jews are in thinking their ceremonial law to be of perpetual obligation; since their own Prophets frequently, and in the plainest terms, intimated, that it was intended only for a season, to prepare the way for a better and more spiritual dispensation: and, in conversing with the Jews, it will be well to shew them this from their own Scriptures, as St. Paul himself has done, in the most satisfactory manner, in his Epistle to the Hebrews.]

2. The nature of that worship which alone is acceptable to God—

[Of the ceremonial observances, when unattended with a spiritual frame of mind, God himself has frequently spoken in the most contemptuous terms[d]———The Temple itself, as the first martyr Stephen informed the Jews, was despicable in God's eyes, if its ordinances were not administered in a becoming manner[e]. It is the incense of a devout spirit, and the offering of a pure heart, that God approves: and wherever these are presented to him,

[a] Rom. xi. 11, 12. [b] Deut. xii. 10—14. [c] Heb. vii. 11—14.
[d] See Isai. i. 10—14. Jer. vi. 20. Am. v. 21—23.
[e] Isai. lxvi. 1, 2. with Acts vii. 48—50.

him, there will he give manifest testimonies of his favourable acceptance. This is plainly intimated in the prophecy before us; and by our Lord himself it is unequivocally declared to the Samaritan woman; "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him[f]."

This is a point that deserves attention from us, as much as from the Jews. We, no less than they, are apt to rest in external observances, and to think that we serve God, if we perform some outward act which he prescribes. But we must never forget that he looketh at the heart, and estimates all our services entirely by that——"If we draw nigh to him with our lips, whilst our heart is far from him, we worship him in vain[g]."]

But to enter more fully into the prophecy, we must notice,

II. What is expressed in it—

It announces clearly,

1. The calling of the Gentiles—

[It is surprising that the Jews should not have seen that the Gentiles were, in God's time, to be called into his Church. The prophecies relating to this subject were innumerable: yet not even the Apostles themselves, for several years after the day of Pentecost, were able to enter into their import, or to acquiesce in the purposes of the Most High. It will not be unprofitable to turn to a few passages in the Psalms, and in the Prophets, relating to this event[h]——We may consult also some passages adduced by the Apostles in relation to it[i]——What can be more clear? Even the text alone, if there had been no other passage, would have been sufficient to establish this point beyond a doubt. How strange then is it, that, even to this hour, the Jews should not be able to see in us the accomplishment of their own prophecies! But it has been well said, that prejudice has neither eyes nor ears; nor can any evidence suffice, without the operation of Divine grace, to bear down its influence. We see this in relation to the Jews and *their* Scriptures; and we must not be stumbled, if we see it in Christians also, notwithstanding the superior light which they enjoy.]

2. The state of the world when that event shall take place—

["God's

[f] John. iv. 21, 23. [g] Matt. xv. 8, 9.

[h] Ps. xxii. 27. & lxxii. 11. In Ps. xcviii. 1—3. it is spoken of as if it were already accomplished. See also Isai. xi. 9. & xlix. 6, 22, 23. & Zech. viii. 20—22. [i] Acts xv. 14—17. Rom. xv. 9—12.

[" God's name will then be great," in every place, and in every heart. The regard paid to him will no longer be formal and fictitious: it will be spiritual and real, from the inmost soul. All his perfections will be then adored: all his dispensations will be received with the profoundest reverence, as the counsels of unerring wisdom, and as the fruits of unchanging love. The name of Christ especially, Oh! how precious will that be! when all the glory of the Godhead is beheld in his face, and all the treasures of divine grace are received through him: verily, as the prophet has said, he will in that day "be exalted and extolled, and be very high." That this will be the case in the latter day, may be seen by what took place in the Apostolic age. It may be farther seen in what is yet daily realized in our own hearts: and so far will it be from being diminished by the further diffusion of divine light, that in that day "the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days;" and "the knowledge of the Saviour's glory will be, no less in depth than in extent, as the waters that cover the sea"———]

This subject may be yet farther IMPROVED,

1. For the edification of our own souls—

[Let us see how far our calling has been productive of suitable effects. What is the estimation in which our Saviour is held by us? and, What are the offerings which from day to day we are presenting before him? Truly if we view him aright, all other things are as dung and dross in comparison of him———and, if we are serving him aright, our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, are sanctified unto him, as a reasonable service[k]———]

2. For the encouragement of our exertions in behalf of others—

[This prophecy must be fulfilled in all its extent. Whatever difficulties may lie in the way, they shall all vanish, as soon as the Lord's time is fully come. The evening shades may in appearance be more and more obscuring the horizon; but "in the evening-time it shall be light." As instruments, we may be but weak: but this need not discourage us. We are not weaker than was the rod whereby Moses wrought all his miracles. If God be pleased to make use of us, "the depths of the sea shall become a way for the ransomed to pass over;" and "the rock shall pour forth its streams to give drink to the chosen people of the Lord." "The Lord will work; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

[k] Rom. xii. 1.

DCLIV.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

Mal. iii. 6. *I, the Lord, change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

THERE is not any thing in the whole creation that is in itself immutable. The angels indeed are, by God's gracious favour, established, so that they are no longer in any danger of sinning: but the fall of the apostate angels sufficiently shews, that the highest creatures are changeable in themselves; and that their stability, whatever it be, is derived from, and dependent on, the power that formed them. As for man, he is in a state of continual change: some of us are yet in a state of childhood: some are grown up to maturity: some have arrived at the period when nature hastens to decay, and when their great last change is near at hand: but all are changing every day, every hour, every moment: like the earth which we inhabit, we have our revolutions of day and night, summer and winter; and in a short period shall undergo an infinitely greater change than any we ever yet experienced. But there is one who changeth not; even Jehovah, from whom all other Beings derive their existence. This immutability he claims as his prerogative, and mentions it as a source of unspeakable blessings to his people. In considering his words, we shall notice,

I. The immutability of God—

The gods of the Heathen were frail and perishable, being wood and stone: but Jehovah is immutably the same,

1. In his essence—

[There is nothing *from without* that can effect a change upon him; because all things were formed by him, and depend upon him for their agency and existence. Nor is there any principle *within* him that can operate to produce a change; because a contrariety of principle would argue imperfection, and consequently be a denial of his Godhead. Besides, if he were to change, it must be either for the better or the worse: if for the better, he was not perfect before; and if for the worse, he is not perfect now: in either case he cannot be God. His very name, JEHOVAH, implies and supposes immutability.]

2. In

2. In his perfections—

[He ever was, and ever will be, the same holy and just, and good, and merciful Being, that he now is. He was not more just, when he condemned the fallen angels; nor more merciful, when he sent his only-begotten Son into the world. In the one case he *displayed* his justice, and, in the other, his mercy, more than he had done before; but his perfections in either case remained the same. "He is a rock: his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he[a]."]

3. In his purposes—

[Every thing is done agreeably to "his eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord[b]." God is said indeed to have "repented that he had made man[c]," and that he had raised Saul to be king[d]: he also revoked the sentence denounced against Nineveh[e], and Hezekiah[f]: on these accounts he may be thought to have altered his original purpose: but he speaks only after the manner of men, who change their conduct in consequence of a change of mind: God knew from the beginning what he would do[g]: and the change was, not in his purposes, but in his dispensations *according to his purpose*[gg].]

4. In his promises—

["All the promises of God in Christ are yea, and amen[h]." If we ever imagine that they fail of their accomplishment, it is wholly owing to our own infirmity[i]. There is no foundation whatever for any such apprehension: for "his gifts and calling are without repentance[k]." We must distinguish indeed between the promises that are conditional, and those which are unconditional: those which are conditional, are of no force, if the condition whereon they are suspended be not performed: and, in reference to those, God said to his people, "Ye shall know my breach of promise[l]." But the unconditional promises (such as that which says "the gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church[m]") are as firm as Omnipotence can make them: "heaven and earth shall pass away; but not a jot or tittle of God's word shall ever pass away[n]." In the day of judgment every Believer will be constrained to confess, that, "of all the good things which God had spoken concerning him, not one has failed[o]."]

Nor

[a] Deut. xxxii. 4. [b] Eph. i. 11. & iii. 11. [c] Gen. vi. 6.
[d] 2 Sam. xv. 35. [e] Jonah iii. 4, 10. [f] Isai. xxxviii. 1, 5.
[g] Acts xv. 18. [gg] Isai. xiv. 24, 27. & xlvi. 10.
[h] 2 Cor. i. 20. [i] Ps. lxxvii. 8, 10. [k] Rom. xi. 29.
[l] Numb. xiv. 30, 34. [m] Matt. xvi. 18. [n] Luke xxi. 33.
[o] Josh. xxiii. 14.

Nor is this a merely speculative truth, but one in which our welfare is deeply involved. This will appear, if we consider,

II. The benefit we derive from it—

To this alone can we ascribe it, that "we have not long since been consumed"—

[The Israelites in this respect were types of us. They were a stiff-necked people, that deserved, on ten thousand occasions, to be destroyed utterly. Moreover, if left to themselves or to their enemies, they would again and again have been consumed. But God spared and preserved them for his word's sake. He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that in their seed should all nations be blessed; and on that account, though he visited the Israelites with many judgments, he did not wholly destroy them. "He changed not; *therefore* they were not consumed."

And what other reason can be assigned for our continuance on mercy's ground? *Have we never merited ercision?* Search, and judge———*Have we no enemies, who would gladly execute upon us the Divine judgments,* if they could gain permission? What else do Satan and his hosts so earnestly desire?———*Have we no inward fire, which, if suffered to burst forth, would effect our ruin?* We should soon follow Judas and Ahitophel, if God should withdraw from us his restraining grace———*Have we not at some time or other been, as it were, within an hair's breadth of ruin,* either from sickness, or accident, or from some foul transgression which would have issued in final obduracy? ———Let us then "give God the glory." Our preservation has not been the effect of our own wisdom, or strength, or goodness, but of God's unchangeable love and mercy. It is to his immutability we owe it, that, notwithstanding all our provocations, he has not been stirred up to destroy us: had he been mutable, like us, his wrath would long since have broke forth against us, and consumed us utterly.]

In this view the holy Scriptures uniformly represent our obligations to the Deity—

[Moses traced to this source, even to the immutability of Jehovah, the continued mercies which Israel experienced in his day[p]. In the Psalms, God himself has been pleased to shew explicitly in what manner he will deal with his offending people, so as to reconcile their welfare with his own veracity[q]. By the prophet Isaiah he expresses a holy jealousy, lest his dispensations should be misconstrued as violations of his word: and declares, that whatever come to pass in the course of his providence,

[p] Deut. vii. 6—9. [q] Ps. lxxxix. 28—35.

providence, he will never break his covenant with his people, or suffer his kindness to depart from them[r]. In short, the whole Volume of Inspiration attests the same blessed truth, that "we are not consumed, because the Divine compassions fail not[s];" and that "the Lord does not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people[t]."]

INFER,

1. What evidence have we of the Divinity of the Lord Jesus!

[Immutability is the unalienable prerogative of the Deity. Creatures may be fixed by God in the condition in which they are: but, as they have only a derived existence, there must have been a period when they began to be what they were not before. But Jesus is, and ever has been, the same with respect to the nature which he possessed before his incarnation[u]; and therefore, with respect to that nature, he is truly and properly God[x]. Let us then hold fast this blessed truth, and rejoice in Christ as an unchangeable Saviour.]

2. What consolation does this subject administer to Believers!

[The frames and feelings of Believers are extremely variable: but He who hath chosen them has "no variableness, neither shadow of turning[y];" and "whom he loveth, he loveth to the end[z]." Now this consideration God has endeavoured strongly to impress upon our minds, (he has even confirmed his promises with an oath,) on purpose that we may derive strong consolation from it[a]. Let every one therefore take comfort from it; and be encouraged, not to indulge sloth and security, (for that were an horrible abuse of this doctrine,) but to apply to God for fresh mercies, and to regard past communications as an earnest and pledge of future blessings.]

3. What a ground of terror is here afforded to the impenitent!

[God has said, that "except we repent, we shall all perish;" and, that "except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven[b]." If therefore any impenitent or unregenerate man be saved, God must falsify his word. O that those amongst you who are unconverted would consider, for one moment, on what ground they stand! Beloved Brethren, consider this; *Either God must change, or you.* But will *God* change? "Is he a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent?"

[r] Isai. liv. 8—10. [s] Lam. iii. 22. [t] 1 Sam. xii. 22.
[u] Heb. i. 10—12. & xiii. 8. [x] 1 Tim. i. 16.
[y] Jam. i. 17. [z] John xiii. 1. [a] Heb. vi. 17, 18.
[b] John iii. 3.

repent[c]?" Will he alter his very nature, and sacrifice all his perfections, in order to save you? All that he can do consistently with his own honour, he is ready and willing to do: but you cannot suppose that he will, or can, divest himself of all the properties of the Godhead, to save you *in your sins*. Know then, that there must be a change in *you*: and, if you become not new creatures in Christ Jesus, you must perish. As long as God is true, your doom is fixed. O "turn ye then! for why will ye die?"]

[c] Numb. xxiii. 19. 1 Sam. xv. 29.

*DCLIV.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP APPROVED OF GOD.

Mal. iii. 16, 17. *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels: and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*

THE wicked in all ages harden themselves and one another in their iniquities. They vindicate their ways even against the charges of God himself; and hope by a kind of confederacy to maintain their cause against God. It is to this that God refers, when he says, "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." To what an extent the Jews carried this daring and contemptuous conduct, may be seen in the preceding context: "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?" They deny the charge, and defy even the omniscient God himself to prove his allegations: and even when their impious speeches are adduced in proof of the charge, they still hold fast their sentiments, and maintain boldly that the service of sin and Satan is preferable to the service of their God[a].

Now from this the people of God may learn a very important lesson, namely, to be as bold for their Master as the wicked are for theirs; and to unite as firmly with each

[a] ver. 13—15.

each other in maintaining the cause of piety, as the wicked do in upholding the maxims and habits of ungodliness. The propriety of this was felt by the godly in the prophet's days; and the Lord testified, by the prophet, his approbation of their conduct.

Let us for own edification consider,

I. The conduct approved—

There were some, even in the worst of times "who feared the Lord," and maintained frequent fellowship with each other for their mutual support. Their conduct in this respect was such as befitted their circumstances, and became their holy profession. Such conduct is extremely useful—

[Those who fear the Lord have the whole world combined against them. They are, however unintentionally on their part, a reproach to the wicked: they exhibit a light, which the ungodly cannot but see: and being actuated by faith, and manifesting by the whole of their life and conversation that their one object is to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life, they, like Noah of old, "condemn the world," who will neither believe, nor endeavour to escape, the impending judgments of their God[b]. Hence "the world hateth them, because they testify of it that the works thereof are evil." Nor is it a slight measure of hatred which they incur: on the contrary, from the moment that they begin to walk in the steps of their Lord and Master, they are made to participate all the odium that was cast on him: and they must consider themselves highly favoured, if they be not called to sacrifice even life itself in the service of their God.

But how shall they endure all these trials? Instead of receiving support from their friends and relatives, they will usually find, that "their greatest enemies are those of their own household." True, it may be said, 'They have a God to go unto; and he will give them all needful succour.' I acknowledge this; and readily grant that no effectual succour can be derived from any other quarter: but still we need, on ten thousand occasions, advice and encouragement from one another; and often derive from fellowship with the saints such consolation as bears us up against all the power of our adversaries. Hence it is that so many directions are given us in Scripture, relative to the performance of this duty. We are all considered as members of one body, every member of which is to extend its regards to the whole, and to supply to those which come in contact with it all the support which it is able to administer[c]. We are to exhort one another[d], and

[b] Heb. xi. 7. with Prov. xxviii. 4. [c] 1 Cor. xii. 25. Eph. iv. 16.
[d] Heb. iii. 13. & x. 24, 25.

and comfort one another[e], and to edify one another in every possible way[f]. Of the benefit arising from such communications we may judge by the effect produced on the minds of the Apostles, when joined by their Lord in their way to Emmaus: "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures[g]?" Yes, and thousands have experienced the same blessed consolations and supports from occasional intercourse with their fellow-saints, who by seasonable advice have "strengthened their hands in God[h]."]

When wisely regulated too it is deserving of high commendation—

[Doubtless the conversation of those who profess religion may easily degenerate, and not unfrequently does degenerate, into the mere "talk of the lips, which tendeth only to penury[i]." But when it is humble, modest, spiritual; when it has a Divine savour in it, and nothing is sought but the glory of God, and the edification of the soul; then it is an ordinance of the Lord, which he will honour with his more immediate presence, agreeably to what he has said, that "where two or three are gathered together in His name, there he will be in the midst of them."]

But of this, we shall see more, by considering distinctly,

II. The approbation given—

God, in testifying his appprobation of his people's conduct, speaks of,

1. That which he himself felt in secret—

[*Inexpressibly beautiful* is the image here presented to our view. We are not to suppose that God needs to listen, in order that he may know what is said; or to write it down, in order that he may remember it. These terms are merely used for the purpose of conveying to our minds, by a familiar image, what, if conveyed in a more abstract form, we should not so readily comprehend. God here represents himself as a parent overhearing the conversation of his little children. In itself, the observation of a child is not worth the attention of a man: but when uttered by a man's own child, it becomes extremely interesting, especially when it is on a subject which denotes the presence of early piety. Hence God represents himself as greatly interested by the conversation which he, as it were accidentally, overhears. The very accents seem to be such as his holy mind will approve: "he hearkens; he hears;" he is, if I may so speak, struck with astonishment; he is exceedingly delighted; he determines not to forget

[e] 1 Thess. iv. 18. & v. 11. [f] ib. ver. 14. Col. iii. 16.
[g] Luke xxiv. 32. [h] 1 Sam. xxiii. 16, 17. [i] Prov. xiv. 23.

forget it; he takes a book, "the book of his remembrance, and writes it down," that from time to time he may refresh his memory with it, and, if occasion offer, bring it to the remembrance of the child himself. Can we conceive any thing more expressive of approbation than such a representation as this, more especially when we consider that it is the Almighty God who portrays himself in this posture, and assumes to himself this character? Know then, that whilst we are affectionately communicating our sentiments and feelings to each other, unconscious that any eye is upon us, or any ear within the reach of our voice, our heavenly Father beholds us, and notes down in his book our every word, and every thought[k]; and that no parent in the universe feels such exquisite delight in the most sagacious observations of his little child, as God does in the mutual communications of his believing people.]

2. That which he will manifest before the assembled universe at the last day—

[There is a day coming when "God will make up his jewels," gathering them together from every quarter of the globe; that being put together, each in its proper place, they may compose the crown with which the Lord Jesus Christ shall be adorned to all eternity. In that day will God search them all out: not one shall be missing; nor shall one counterfeit be found amongst them. Amongst them will be found all who bare the character assigned them in the text, even all who "feared God, and spake often one to another" respecting the things belonging to their everlasting peace. In themselves they are unworthy of such an honour, yea, deserving rather of God's wrath and indignation: but God will spare them, not merely as a father spares a disobedient son, but as he would spare the most faithful and beloved of his children. To enter into this representation, reflect on David's anxiety for Absalom, at the very time that Absalom was come forth to dethrone and destroy him: and further reflect on the grief, the inconsolable grief he expressed, when he heard that this rebellious son was slain in battle. If he then, a mortal man, felt such solicitude to spare a rebellious and parricidal son, what must be implied in the promise of the Most High God to "spare his people as a man spareth his own son that serveth him?" Surely no evil from whatever quarter shall come unto them: when the goats are banished from his presence, the sheep shall be gathered into his fold; when the chaff is burnt up with fire unquenchable, they, as wheat, shall be treasured up in his garner; and as his peculiar treasure shall they be preserved to be his joy, and glory, for evermore. They confessed him before men in this world; and he will

[k] See Jer. xxxi. 18. Hos. xiv. 8. Ps. lvi. 8.

will confess them in the presence of all his holy angels for ever and ever.]

We will yet further IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of advice—

[Do not rest satisfied with a religion that is altogether secret. Religion doubtless, in its sublimest actings, is secret, because it consists in the exercise of our affections upon God himself: but it is impossible so to conceal our piety, that the world shall not discern its operations; for it must influence us in the whole of our life and conversation: and if any one think to maintain an upright walk before God, and at the same time to escape the reproaches of an ungodly world, he deceives his own soul. We might as well hope that light should pass unobserved in darkness, as that a man who fears God should pass unnoticed through a world that lieth in wickedness. The world unite with those who are of the same mind and spirit with themselves: and so must the godly do: and "in the excellent of the earth must be their chief delight." And the man who, through fear of the cross, draws back from the society of the saints, has yet to learn what is meant by being ashamed of Christ, and what portion all such persons have to expect at his hands[1]. Let all therefore learn to confess Christ openly before men, and to "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach:" and instead of shunning the cross, let all learn to rejoice and glory in it, and to "account, as Moses did, the reproach of Christ a greater treasure than all the riches of Egypt."]

2. In a way of caution—

[Whilst we advise all not through fear to shun religious society, we would affectionately guard all against placing their religion in social converse of any kind. It is not always those who "speak most one to another" that are the best in God's estimation: on the contrary, those who are the most forward to talk, are often the least humble, and the least correct in their secret deportment. Persons of this description ought to be peculiarly jealous of themselves, lest, whilst they pretend to be seeking the edification of others, they be in reality filled with self-conceit, and advancing only their own glory. God, who sees the heart, often beholds a thousand times more piety in the humble hearer, than in the admired speaker: and therefore it is particularly marked in my text, that God noted in his book the frame of those "*who thought upon* his name." Yes, the *thinkers*, if I may so speak, whilst lamenting perhaps their incapacity to speak, and admiring almost with envy the fluency of others, are often noticed by God with pre-eminent delight; whilst the *speakers*, being filled with pride and self-sufficiency, are objects of his abhorrence. Let none

[1] Mark viii. 34—38.

none then pride themselves in their fluency, or be dejected for the want of it: but let all remember, that, when "God shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, they, and they only, shall have praise of God[m]," whose fear of him was accompanied with love, and evidenced by a humble, holy, heavenly deportment.]

[m] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

END OF VOL. VI.

LONDON:
Printed by R. Watts, Crown Court, Temple Bar.

00110972

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 02 January, 2016